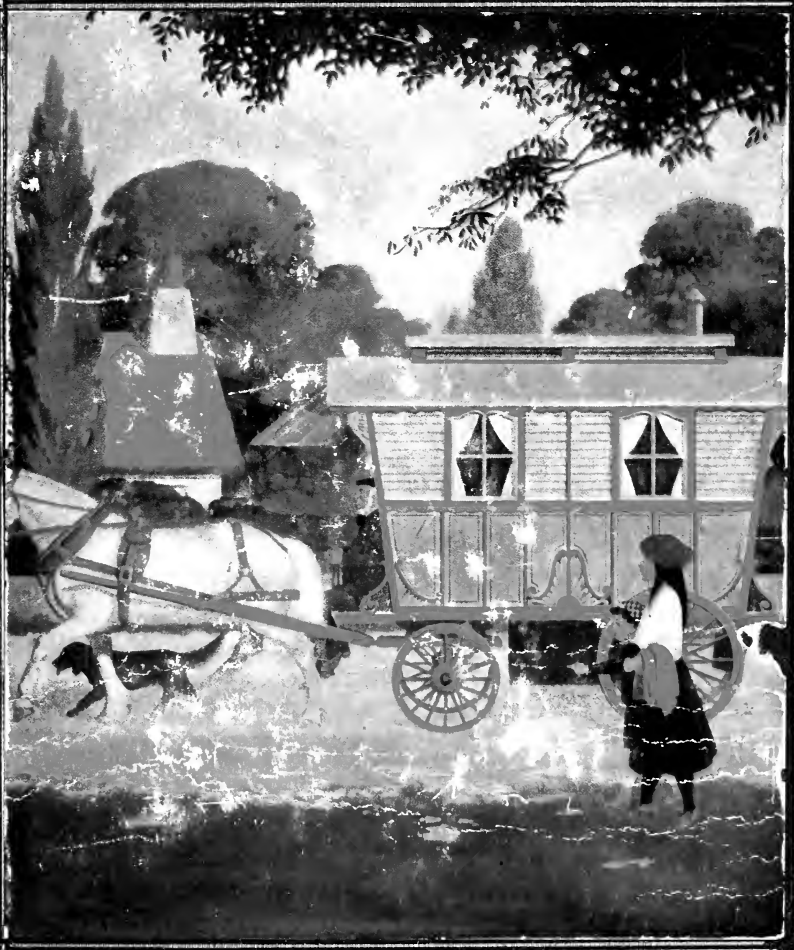
THE SLOWCOACH

EDWARD VERRALL LUCAS



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THE SLOWCOACH

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BY

E. V. LUCAS

AUTHOR OF "ANNE'S TERRIBLE GOOD NATURE"

ILLUSTRATED

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1910

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Avories	1
II.	The Sound of Mysterious Wheels	16
III.	The Thorough Examination	25
IV.	The Items	34
V.	Diogenes and Moses	45
VI.	The Plans	56
VII.	Mr. Lenox's Young Brother	70
VIII.	The First Day	86
IX.	The First Night	98
X.	The Adventure of the Second Caravan	109
XI.	The Wayside Friend	119
XII.	Stratford-on-Avon	130
XIII.	The Adventure of the Young Policeman	150
XIV.	The Adventure of the Little Old Lady	167
XV.	The Adventure of the Runaway Ponies	236
XVI.	The Black Spaniels	250
XVII.	The Adventure of the Lost Baby	268
XVIII.	The Adventure of the Old Irishwoman	283

E 404

CHAPTER		PAGE
XIX.	The Letter to X.	297
XX.	The Adventure of the Line of Poetry	311
XXI.	Collins's People	329
XXII.	The Adventure of the Giant . .	340
XXIII.	The Most Surprising Adventure of All	352
XXIV.	The End	362

FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS

The Slowcoach	*Frontispiece*
	FACING PAGE
"Runcie"	14
It was a Real Caravan	26
It's quite Time he watched a Kettle Boil	40
Strong as an Elephant and Docile as a Tortoise	54
Britannia Depicta; or, "Ogilby" Improved, 1753,	*between* 66–67
The Gardener sitting on the Caravan Steps reading the Paper	72
The Most Supreme Stew of the Century	104
What the Dickens do you Want?	116
They lay on their Backs and studied the Stars	128
The Children at the Farm-house	162
Each of them was allowed to hide in the Priest's Hiding-hole	164
God send this Crumb well Down	172
He returned to his Hiding-place for the Rest of the Weary Day	194
We are seeking a Rebel	200
Down he fell without a Sound	210

FACING PAGE

Hugh, flinging a Parting Word of Derision, left him Floundering 228

The Vision of Eoves 236

Aunt May was standing by the Gate 252

I see a Beautiful Wedding, White Satin, Flowers, Bridesmaids 280

ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE TEXT

PAGE

Her Bowling was fast and straight, and usually too much for Robert 7

Gregory also knew One Policeman 9

Her way with the Butcher's Boy was Terrible . . 13

"Kink" 19

I had to give him out Leg-before at the Annual Estate Match 39

She also gave Janet Some Lessons in Frying-pan Cooking 44

A Small Man with a Squint 48

Janet and Mary studying the Stores List . . . 64

The First Day 69

Janet 88

He frightened away Two Tramps who seemed likely to be Troublesome 113

Mr. MacAngus had just finished his Ham and Eggs, and was lighting his Pipe 120

Nicholas Imber 132

The Shakespeare Monument 136

Benjamin Roper was beginning his Duties as a Member of the Warwickshire Constabulary . . 153

Robert made Friends with an Old Labourer . . 239

PAGE

The Old Irishwoman 285

Gregory and the Geese 298

A Tall and Handsome Young Man came out, dressed in a Cricket Blazer over a Clergyman's Waistcoat and Collar 322

Mrs. Pescod was a Comfortable, Smiling Woman . 335

It was a Delightful Farm 337

You mustn't look at me like That 341

A Short Gentleman with a Red Face and Two Boys . 353

THE SLOWCOACH

THE SLOWCOACH

CHAPTER I

THE AVORIES

Once upon a time there was a nice family. Its name was Avory, and it lived in an old house in Chiswick, where the Thames is so sad on grey days and so gay on sunny ones.

Mr. — or rather Captain — Avory was dead; he had been wounded at Spion Kop, and died a few years after. Mrs. Avory was thirty-five, and she had four children. The eldest was Janet, aged fourteen, and the youngest was Gregory Bruce, aged seven. Between these came Robert Oliver, who was thirteen, and Hester, who was nine. They were all

very fond of each other, and they rarely quarrelled. (If they had done so, I should not be telling this story. You don't catch me writing books about people who quarrel.) They adored their mother.

The name of the Avories' house was "The Gables," which was a better name than many houses have, because there actually were gables in its roof. Hester, who had funny ideas, wanted to see all the people who lived in all the houses that are called "The Gables" everywhere drawn up in a row so that she might examine them. She used to lie awake at night and wonder how many there would be. "I'm sure mother would be the most beautiful, anyway," she used to say.

History was Hester's passion. She could read history all day. Here she differed from Robert Oliver, who was all for geography. Their friends knew of

these tastes, of course, and so Hester's presents were nearly always history-books or portraits of great men, such as Napoleon and Shakespeare, both of whom she almost worshipped, while Robert's were compasses and maps. He also had a map-measurer (from Mr. Lenox), and at the moment at which this story opens, his birthday being just over, he was the possessor of a pedometer, which he carried fastened to his leg, under his knickerbockers, so that it was certain to register every time he took a step. He kept a careful record of the distance he had walked since his birthday, and could tell you at any time what it was, if you gave him a minute or two to crawl under the table and undo his clothes. He could be heard grunting in dark places all day long, having been forbidden by Janet to undress in public.

Robert's birthday was on June 20, Hester's on November 8, and Janet's on Febru-

ary 28. She had the narrowest escape, you see, of getting birthdays only once in every four years; which is one of the worst things that can happen to a human being. Gregory Bruce was a little less lucky, for his birthday was on December 20, which is so near to Christmas Day that mean persons have been known to make one gift do for both events. None the less, Gregory's possessions were very numerous; for he had many friends, and most of them were careful to keep these two great anniversaries apart.

Gregory's particular passion just now was the names of engines, of which he had one of the finest collections in Europe; but a model aëroplane which Mr. Scott had given him was beginning to turn his thoughts towards the conquest of the air, and whereas he used to tell people that he meant to be an engine-driver when he grew up, he was now adding, "or a man like Wilbur Wright."

Most children have wanted to fly ever since "Peter Pan" began, and, as I dare say you have heard, some have tried from the nursery window, with perfectly awful results, having neglected to have their shoulders first touched magically; but Gregory Bruce Avory wanted to fly in a more regular and scientific manner. He wanted to fly like an engineer. To his mind, indeed, the flying part of "Peter Pan" was the least fascinating; he preferred the underground home, and the fight with the Indians, and the mechanism of the crocodile. For a short time, in fact, his only ambition had been to be the crocodile's front half.

Janet, on the other hand, liked Nana and the pathetic motherly parts the best; Robert's favourite was Smee, and often at meal-times he used to say, "Woe is me, I have no knife"; while Hester was happiest in the lagoon scene. This difference of taste in one small family shows

how important it is for anyone who writes a play to put a lot of variety into it.

Janet, the eldest, was also the most practical. She was, in fact, towards the others almost more of a younger mother than an elder sister. Not that Mrs. Avory neglected them at all; but Janet relieved her of many little duties. She always knew when their feet were likely to be wet, and Robert had once said that she had "stocking-changing on the brain." She could cook, too, especially cakes, and the tradesmen had a great respect for her judgment when she went shopping. She knew when a joint would be too fat, and you should see her pointing out the bone!

Janet was a tall girl, and very active, and, in spite of her responsibilities, very jolly. She played hockey as well almost as a boy, which is, of course, saying everything, and her cricket was good, too. Her bowling was fast and straight, and usually too much for Robert, who knew, however,

the initials of all the gentlemen and the Christian names and birthplaces of most

Her bowling was fast and straight, and usually too much for Robert.

of the professionals. Gregory could not bear cricket, except when it was his own innings, which he seemed to enjoy during

its brief duration. Hester thought it dull throughout, so that Janet had to depend upon Robert and the Rotherams for the best games.

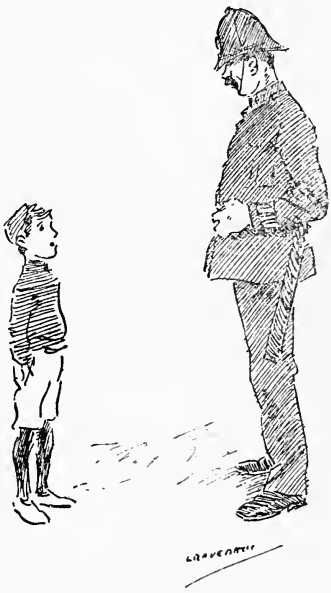
Janet had very straight fair hair, and just enough freckles to be pretty. She looked nicest in blue. Hester, on the contrary, was a dark little thing, whose best frock was always red.

As for the boys — it doesn't matter what boys are like; but Gregory, I might say, usually had black hands, not because he was naturally a grubby little beast, but because engineers do. Robert, on the contrary, was disposed to be dressy, and he declined to allow his mother or Janet to buy his socks or neckties without first consulting him as to colours.

Among the friends of the family must be put first Uncle Chris, who was Captain Avory's brother and a lawyer in Golden Square. Uncle Chris looked after Mrs. Avory's money and gave advice. He was

very nice, and came to dinner every Sunday (hot roast beef and horse-radish sauce). There was an Aunt Chris, too, but she was an invalid and could not leave her room, where she lay all the time and remembered birthdays.

Next to Uncle Chris came Mr. Scott, who was a famous author and a very good cricketer on the lawn, and Mr. Lenox, who was private secretary to a real lord, and therefore had lots of time and money. Both Mr. Scott and Mr. Lenoxwere bachelors, as the best friends of families always



Gregory also knew one policeman.

are; unless, of course, their wives are invalids.

Gregory, who was more social than Robert, also knew one policeman, one coachman, three chauffeurs, and several Chiswick boatmen extremely intimately. Robert's principal friend outside the family was a bird-stuffer in Hammersmith; but he does not come into this story.

The Avories did not go to boarding-school, or, indeed, to any school in the ordinary way at all; Mrs. Avory said she could not spare them. Instead they were visited every day except Saturdays by Mr. Crawley and Miss Bingham, who taught them the things that one is supposed to know — Mr. Crawley taking the boys in the old billiard-room, and Miss Bingham the girls in the morning-room. At some of the lessons — such as history — they all joined. The classes were attended also by the Rotherams, the doctor's children, who lived at "Fir Grove," and

Horace Campbell, the only son of the vicar. So it was a kind of school, after all.

Horace Campbell had always intended to be a cowboy when he grew up, but a visit to a play called "Raffles" was now rather inclining him to gentlemanly burglary. William Rotheram, like Gregory, leaned towards flying; but Jack Rotheram voted steadily for the sea, and talked of little but Osborne.

Mary Rotheram played with a bat almost as straight as "Plum" Warner's, and she knew most of the old Somersetshire songs — "Mowing the Barley," and "Lord Rendal," and "Seventeen come Sunday" — by heart, and sang them beautifully. Gregory, who used to revel in Sankey's hymns as sung by Eliza Pollard, the parlourmaid, now thought that the Somerset music was the only real kind. Mary Rotheram had a snub nose and quantities of freckles and a very nice nature.

"The Gables" had a large garden, with a shrubbery of evergreens in it and a cedar. It was not at all a garden-party garden, because there was a well-worn cricket-pitch right in the middle of the lawn, and Gregory had a railway system where the best flowers ought to be; but it was a garden full of fun, and old Kink, the gardener, managed to get a great many vegetables out of it, too, although not so many as Collins thought he ought to.

Collins was the cook, a fat, smiling, hot lady of about fifty, who had been with Mrs. Avory ever since she married. Collins understood children thoroughly, and made cakes that were rather wet underneath. Her Yorkshire pudding (for Sunday's dinner) was famous, and her horse-radish sauce was so perfect that it brought tears to the eyes.

Collins collected picture post-cards and adored the family. She had never been cross to any of them, but her way with

the butcher's boy and the grocer's boy and the fishmonger's boy was terrible. She snapped their heads off (so to speak) every morning, and old Kink spent quite a lot of his time in rubbing from off the back-door the awful things they wrote about her in chalk.

Her way with the butcher's boy was terrible.

The parlour-maid was Eliza Pollard, who had red hair and a kind heart, but was continually falling out with her last young man and getting another. She told Hester all about it. Hester had a special knack of being told about the servants' young men, for she knew also all about those of Eliza Pollard's predecessors.

The housemaid was Jane Masters, who helped Eliza Pollard to make the beds. Jane Masters did not hold with fickleness in love — in fact, she couldn't abide it — and therefore she was steadily true to a young man called 'Erb, who looked after the lift at the Stores, and was a particular friend of Gregory's in consequence. No man who had charge of a lift could fail to be admired by Gregory.

Finally — and very likely she ought to have come first — was Runcie, or Mrs. Runciman, who had not only been the nurse of all the Avories, but of Mrs. Avory before them, when Mrs. Avory was a slip of a girl named Janet Easton. Runcie was then quite young herself, and why she was suddenly called Mrs. no one ever quite knew, for she had never married. And now she was getting on for sixty, and had not much to do except sympathize with the Avories and reprove the servants. She had a nice sitting-room of her own,

"Runcie."

where she sat comfortably every afternoon when such work as she did was done, and received visits from her pets, as she called the children (none of whom, however, was quite so dear to her as their mother), and listened to their adventures.

On those evenings on which he came to "The Gables" Mr. Lenox always looked in on her for a little gossip; and this was called his "runcible spoon" — the joke being that Mr. Lenox and Runcie were engaged to be married.

And now you know the Avory family root and branch.

CHAPTER II

THE SOUND OF MYSTERIOUS WHEELS

One day in late June the Avories and the Rotherams and Horace Campbell were sitting at tea under the cedar talking about a great tragedy that had befallen. For Mrs. Avory had just heard that Mrs. Dudeney — their regular landlady at Sea View, in the Isle of Wight, where they had had lodgings every summer for years and years, and where they were all ready to go next month as usual — Mrs. Avory had just heard that Mrs. Dudeney had been taken very ill, and no other rooms were to be had.

Here was a blow! For the Rotherams always went to Sea View too, and had a tent on the little strip of beach under the

wood adjoining the Avories', and they did everything together. And now it was very likely that the Avories would not get lodgings at all, and certainly would not get any half so good as Mrs. Dudeney's, where their ways were known, and their bathing-dresses were always dried at once in case they wanted to go in again, and so on.

They were all discussing this together, and saying what a shame it was, when suddenly the unfamiliar sound of the opening of the old stable-yard gates was heard, and then heavy wheels scrunched in and men's voices called out directions, such as, "Steady, Joe!" "A little bit to the near side, Bill!" and so forth.

Now, since the stable-yard had not been used for years, it was no wonder that the whole party was, so to speak, on tiptoe, longing to run and investigate. But Mrs. Avory had always objected very strongly to inquisitiveness, and so they stayed where they were and waited expectantly. And

then, after a minute or so, Kink came up to the table with a twinkle in his old eye and a letter in his old hand.

"Didn't we hear the sound of a carriage?" Mrs. Avory asked.

"Did you, mum?" said old Kink, who was a great tease.

"I'm sure there were wheels," said Mrs. Avory.

Kink said nothing.

"Of course there were wheels," said Robert. "Don't be such an old humbug."

But Kink only twinkled.

"It's only coals," said Gregory; "isn't it?"

"The first I've heard of coals," said Kink.

"Kinky dear," said Janet, "is it something awfully exciting?"

"Nothing very exciting about a house, that I know of, Miss Janet," said Kink.

"A house!" cried Janet. "It couldn't have been a house!"

"There's all sorts of houses," said Kink; "there's houses on the ground and there's houses on ——"

"O Kinky," cried Hester, "I know!"

"Kink."

And she clapped her hands and absolutely screamed. "I know. It's a caravan!"

"A caravan!" the children shouted together, and with one movement they dashed off to see.

Old Kink laughed and Mrs. Avory laughed.

"It's a caravan right enough," he said. "And a very pretty one, too, and none of they nasty gipsies in it neither."

"But where does it come from?" Mrs. Avory asked, and in reply Kink handed her the letter; but she had done no more than open it when Janet ran back to drag her to see the wonderful sight.

Gregory, I need hardly say, was already on the box with the whip in his hand, while all the others were inside, except Horace Campbell, who had climbed on the roof, and was telephoning down the chimney. The men and horse that had brought it were gone.

"Oh, mother," cried Hester, "whose is it? Is it ours?"

"I expect the letter tells us everything," said Mrs. Avory, and, sitting on the top of the steps, she unfolded the letter, and, after looking through, read it aloud.

This is what it said :

"Dear Children,

"It has long been my wish to give you a new kind of present, but I have hitherto had no luck. I thought once of an elephant, and even wrote to Jamrach about the idea — a small elephant, not a mountain — but I gave that up. Chiswick is too crowded, and your garden is too small. But now I think I have found the very thing. A caravan. It belonged to a lady artist, who, having to live abroad, wished to sell it; and it is now yours. I tell you this so that mother need not be afraid that it is dirty. It should reach you this week, and can stand in the old coach-house until you are ready to set forth on the discovery of your native land. I should have liked also to have added a horse and a man; but you must do that and keep an account of what everything costs, and let me know when I come back from abroad. I shall expect some day a long account of your adventures, and

if you keep a log-book, so much the better.

"I am,

"Your true, if unsettling, friend,

"X.

"P.S. — You will find a use for the enclosed key sooner or later, and if you want to write to me, address the letter to 'X., care of Smithurst and Wynn, Lincoln's Inn Fields, W.C.'"

For a while after the letter was finished the Avories were too excited and thoughtful to speak, while as for the Rotherams and Horace Campbell, however they may have tried, they could not disguise an expression, if not exactly of envy, certainly of disappointment. There was no X. in their family.

"May we really go away in it and discover England?" Robert asked.

"I suppose so," said Mrs. Avory.

"Then that makes Sea View all right," said Gregory. "Because this will do instead."

The poor Rotherams! Sea View had suddenly become tame and almost tiresome.

Mrs. Avory saw their regrets in their faces, and cheered them up by the remark that the caravan must sometimes be lent to others.

"Oh, yes," said Janet. "Do you think Dr. Rotheram would let you go?" she asked Mary.

"Of course he would," said Jack. "But I wish it was a houseboat."

The suggestion was so idiotic that everyone fell on him in scorn.

"But who is X.?" Mrs. Avory asked.

The letter was written in a round office-hand that told nothing. Mr. Scott was the most likely person, but why should Mr. Scott hide? He never had done such a thing. Or Mr. Lenox? But neither

was it his way to be secret and mysterious. Nor was it Uncle Christopher's.

When, however, you have a caravan given you, and it is standing there waiting to be explored, the question who gave it or did not give it becomes unimportant.

Gregory put the case in a nutshell. "Never mind about old X. now," he said. "Let's make a thorough examination!"

CHAPTER III

THE THOROUGH EXAMINATION

It was a real caravan. That is to say, either gipsies might have lived in it, or anyone that did live in it would soon be properly gipsified. It was painted in gay colours, and had little white blinds with very neat waists and red sashes round them. That is the right kind of caravan. The brown caravans highly varnished are wrong: they may be more luxurious, but no gipsy would look at them.

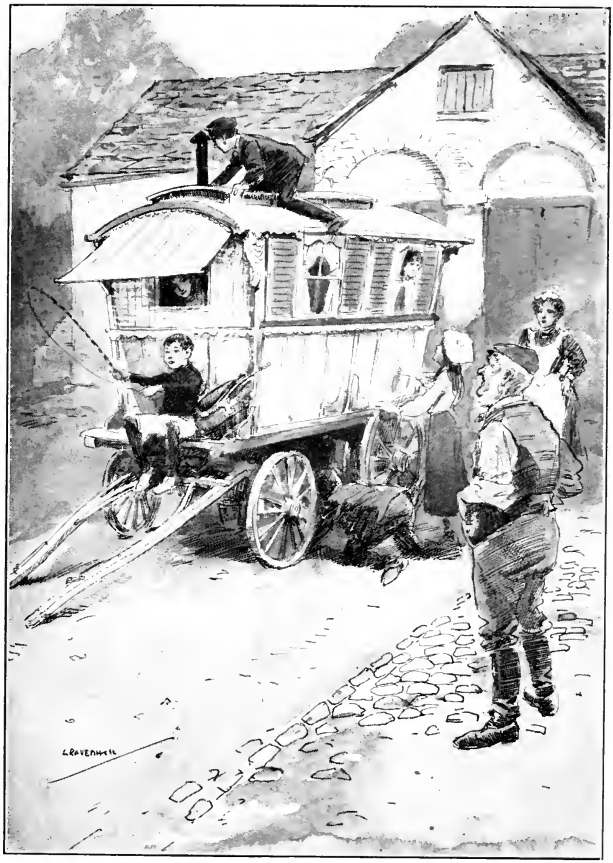
The body of it was green — a good apple-green — and the panels were lined with blue. Some people say that blue and green won't go together; but don't let us take any notice of them. Just look at the bed of forget-me-nots, or a copse of bluebells;

or, for that matter, try to see the Avories' caravan. The window-frames and bars were white. The spokes and hubs of the wheels were red. It was most awfully gay.

Inside — but the inside of a caravan is so exciting that I hardly know how to hold my pen. The inside of a caravan! Can you imagine a better phrase than that? I can't. If Coleridge's statement is true that poetry is the best words in the best order, then that is the best poem: the inside of a caravan!

The caravan was sixteen feet six inches long and six feet two inches high inside. From the ground it stood ten feet. It was six feet four inches wide. If you measure these distances in the dining-room, you will see how big it was, and you will be able to imagine yourselves in it.

The woodwork was all highly varnished, and very new and clean. More than half-way down the caravan were heavy curtains



It was a Real Caravan.

hanging across it, and behind these was the bedroom, containing four beds, two on each wall, on hinged shelves, that could be let down flat against the wall by day, when the folding-chairs could be unfolded, and the bedroom then became a little boudoir.

The floor space was, however, filled this afternoon with great bundles which turned out to be gipsy tents and sleeping-sacks. "For the boys and Kink to sleep in," said Janet; "but we must be very careful about waterproof sheeting on the ground first."

The rest of the caravan, between the door and the bedroom — about ten feet — was the kitchen and living-room. Here every inch of the wall was used, either by chairs that folded back like those in the corridors of railway-carriages, or by shelves, racks, cupboards, or pegs. There were two tables, which also folded to the wall.

The stove was close to the door, but, of course, no one who lives in a caravan ever

uses the stove except when it is raining. You make the fire out of doors at all other times, and swing the pot from three sticks. (Hedgehog stew! Can't you smell it?) There were kitchen utensils on hooks and racks on each side of the stove, which was covered in with shining brass, and rows of enamelled cups and saucers, and plates, and knives and forks. The living-room floor was covered with linoleum; the bedroom floor had a carpet. Swinging candlesticks were screwed into the wall here and there. It was more like the cabin of a ship than anything on land could ever be, and Jack Rotheram began to weaken towards it.

In course of time other things were discovered, showing what a thorough person X. was. A large india-rubber bath, for instance, and a bath-sheet to go under it. A Beatrice oil-stove and oil. An electric torch for sudden requirements at night. A tea-basket for picnics. Quan-

tities of cart-oil. A piece of pumice-stone (very thoughtful). There was also a box of little india-rubber pads with tintacks, the use for which (not discovered till later) was to prevent the rattling of the furniture by making it fit a little better. And in one of the cupboards was a bottle of camphor pills, and a tin of tobacco labelled "For Tramps and Gipsies."

There was even a bookshelf with books on it: "Hans Andersen," "The Arabian Nights," "Lavengro," "Inquire Within," "Mrs. Beeton," "Bradshaw" (rather cowardly, Robert thought), and "The Blue Poetry-Book." There was also "The Whole Art of Caravaning," with certain passages marked in pencil, such as this:

"We pull up to measure the breadth of the gate, and if it be broad enough, send forward an ambassador to the farm, who shall explain that we would fain camp here, that we are not gipsies, vagabonds

or suspicious characters, that we will leave all as we find it, and will not rob or wantonly destroy. And in case of need, he shall delicately hint that we may incidentally provide good custom in butter, eggs, milk, and half a dozen other things. Our ambassador must also, if it be possible, secure a stall for the horse."

And this useful reminder:

"We must have water near at hand and a farm within reasonable distance, and we should look for shelter from prevailing winds. We must avoid soft ground, and it is a mistake to camp in long grass unless the weather be particularly dry. We should be as far as possible from the road if there is much traffic upon it. It is great advantage if there is a stream or lake at hand for bathing. An old pasture field sloping away from the road will often satisfy our requirements in low-lying districts. And up among the moors we shall be content to take a piece of level ground where we can find it. There will be nothing to disturb us there."

And this excellent caravan poem:

"I love the gentle office of the cook,
The cheerful stove, the placid twilight hour,
When, with the tender fragrance of the flower,
And all the bubbling voices of the brook,

"The coy potato or the onion browns,
The tender steak takes on a nobler hue.
I ponder 'mid the falling of the dew,
And watch the lapwings circling o'er the downs.

"Like portals at the pathway of the moon
Two trees stand forth in pencilled silhouette
Against the steel-grey sky, as black as jet —
The steak is ready. Ah! too soon! too soon!"

So much (with one exception) for the inside of the caravan. Underneath it were still other things, for a box with perforated sides swung between the wheels, and this was the larder, always cool and shady (except, as Janet remarked, on dusty days), and near it on hooks were a hanging saucepan, a great kettle, two pails, and two market-baskets, a nose-bag, and a skid. Close by was a place for oats and chaff.

A new set of harness was packed on the box, and it was so complete that on each of the little brass ornaments that hang on the horse's chest was the letter "A." On the back of the caravan was a shelf that might be let down, making a kind of sideboard for outdoor meals.

For two or three days the caravan did nothing but hold receptions. Everyone who knew the Avories came to see it — even Robert's bird-stuffer, who said he would like to borrow it for a week's holiday in Epping Forest, and observe Nature through its windows. Several of Gregory's intimates also examined it, and approved. Miss Bingham pronounced it elegant and commodious, and Mr. Crawley (who, like all schoolmasters and tutors, made too many puns) said that its probable rate of speed reminded him of his name. Collins wished she might never have to cook in it, but otherwise was very tolerant. Eliza Pollard said that her choice

would be a motor-car, and Jane Masters brought 'Erb back on Sunday afternoon, and they examined it together and decided that with such a home as that they might be married at once.

I have left till the last the most exciting thing of all. In an enclosure, you remember, was a key concerning the purpose of which nothing was said in the letter. Well, in the course of the exploration of the caravan, which went on for some days, always yielding a fresh discovery, Robert came upon a box securely fastened to the floor in a dark corner.

"Mother! mother!" he cried; "where's that key? I've found a mysterious keyhole!"

They all hurried to the stable-yard to see, and Robert swiftly inserted the key, and turned it. He fell back, too much overcome to speak. The box contained twenty-five new sovereigns.

CHAPTER IV

THE ITEMS

Mr. Lenox either knew everything, or knew someone who knew everything, so that he was always certain to be able to help in any difficulty. Mrs. Avory wrote to him to come round and consult with her about it, and he was there at tea-time.

"A caravan!" he said, after she had finished. "Ripping! Nothing better."

"Yes," said Mrs. Avory, "but ——"

"Oh, well," said Mr. Lenox, "that's all right. A few little bothers, but soon over." He checked them off on his finger. "Item — as your old Swan of Avon, Hester, would say — item, a driver."

"I was thinking of Kink," said Mrs. Avory; "but there's the garden."

"Yes," said Mr. Lenox, "and there's also Kink. Do you think he'd go?"

"The best thing to do is to ask him," said Mrs. Avory. "Gregory, just run and bring Kink in."

Kink soon appeared, fresh from the soil.

"Would you be willing to drive the caravan if we decided to use it?" Mrs. Avory asked.

"'If'!" cried the children. "Steady on, mother. 'If'!"

Kink, who was a great tease, pretended to think for quite a long time, until his silence had driven the children nearly desperate. "Yes," he then said, "I should, mum, provided you let me find a trustworthy man to go on with the garden. Otherwise I shouldn't dare to face Mrs. Collins when I came back."

"That's very kind of you, Kink," said Mrs. Avory.

"Good old Kinky!" said Gregory.

"Yes," said Mr. Lenox. "And now for item two. The horse. How would you go to work to get a horse, Kink?"

"Well," said Kink, "that's a little out of my way. A horse-radish, yes; but not a horse."

Everyone laughed: the old man expected it.

"Then," said Mr. Lenox, with a mock sigh, "I suppose the horse will have to be found by me. We don't want to buy one — only to hire it."

"Don't let's have a horse," said Gregory; "let's have a motor. I think a motor caravan would be splendid."

"There you're quite wrong," said Mr. Lenox. "The life-blood of a caravan is sloth; the life-blood of a motor is speed. You can't mix them. And how could Robert here survey England creditably if he rushed through it in a motor? You're going to survey England, aren't you, Bobbie? No, it must be a horse, and I

will get it. I will make friends with cabmen, and coachmen, and grooms, and stable-boys. I will carry a straw in my mouth. I will get a horse to do you credit. What colour would you like?"

"White," said Janet.

"It shall be a white horse," said Mr. Lenox. "And now," he added, "the way is cleared for item three. Can you guess what that is?"

They all tried to guess, but could not. They were too excited.

"A dog," said Mr. Lenox.

"Oh, yes," they cried.

"To guard the caravan at night and when we are away," said Janet.

"Exactly," said Mr. Lenox. "And what kind of a dog?"

"A dachshund," said Hester.

"Too small," said Mr. Lenox.

"A St. Bernard," said Robert.

"Too mild," said Mr. Lenox.

"A spaniel," said Janet.

"Too gentle," said Mr. Lenox.

"A fox-terrier," said Gregory.

"Not strong enough," said Mr. Lenox.

"I leave it to Mr. Lenox," said Mrs. Avory.

"Very well, then," said Mr. Lenox, "a retriever — a retriever, because it is big and formidable, and also because, when tied up, it will always be on the watch. We'll buy the *Exchange and Mart*, and look up retrievers. We can't hire a dog; we must buy outright there. Now, then, Bobbie, item four?"

"Maps," said Bobbie.

"Right," said Mr. Lenox. "I wish I was coming with you."

"Do," they all cried.

"I can't," said Mr. Lenox. "If I were to go away before September, I should get the sack, and then I should starve. His Lordship is sufficiently cross with me now, because I had to give him out leg-before at the annual estate match last Saturday,

when I was umpiring. He couldn't stand anything else."

That night Mrs. Avory, Uncle Christopher, Mr. Scott, and Mr. Lenox were talking after dinner.

I had to give him out leg-before at the annual estate match.

"It's a very wonderful present," said Mrs. Avory; "but there are two things about it that are not quite satisfactory. One is that one likes to know where such gifts come from, and the other is that for a party of children to go away alone, with only Kink, is a great responsibility." (That's a word which mothers are very fond of.) "Suppose they're ill?"

"It's a risk you must take," said Uncle Chris. "Don't anticipate trouble."

"Because," Mrs. Avory went on, "I should not go with them, although I might arrange to meet them here and there on their journey. They would like me to be with them, I know, and they would like to be without me, I know."

"I shouldn't worry about the giver of the present," said Mr. Scott. "You have many friends from whom you would have no objection to accept a caravan, and there's no harm in one of those friends wishing to be anonymous. As for the other matter, I don't see much risk so long as Kink goes too. He's a careful and very capable old sport, and Janet's as good a mother as you any day."

Mrs. Avory laughed. "Yes, I know that," she said. "But what about gipsies and tramps?"

"One has always got to take a few chances," said Uncle Christopher. "They

It's quite Time he watched a Kettle Boil.

may get things stolen now and then from the outside of the caravan, but I should doubt if anything else happened. Kink and a good dog would see to that. And Janet would see to the children keeping dry, or getting dry quickly after rain, and so forth. Such an experience as a fortnight in a caravan of their own should be a splendid thing for all of them. Gregory, for example — it's quite time that he studied the A B C of engineering and began where James Watt began, instead of merely profiting by the efforts of all the investigators since then. I mean, it's quite time he watched a kettle boil; and Hester would get no harm by mixing a little washing-up with her 'Romeo and Juliet' wool-gathering."

"I think you're right," said Mrs. Avory; "and I'm sure they are very unlikely to get any such experience here. But I shall be very nervous."

"No, you won't," said Mr. Lenox, "be-

cause we'll arrange that you shall have news. I have thought of that. A telegram every morning at breakfast and a telegram every evening after tea. That will be perfectly simple. And letters, of course."

In this way it was settled that the Great Experiment might be tried, especially as so wise a woman as Collins and so old an ally as Runcie were not against it. Both, indeed, were of Uncle Christopher's opinion that the self-help and self-reliance which the caravan would lead to would be of the greatest use.

Collins, when she heard later some hint of the possible route the caravan would follow, became not only a supporter of the scheme, but an enthusiast, because her own home was not distant, and she made the children promise to spend a day there with her brother, the farmer. She also gave Janet some lessons in frying-pan cooking.

Runcie never became an enthusiast, but

she allowed herself to be interested, if cautionary.

"To think of the nice comfortable beds you will be leaving," she would say.

"A horse is a vain thing for safety," she would say.

"The blisters you'll get on your poor feet!" she would say.

"The indigestion!" she would say.

"Living like gipsies," she would say.

"No proper washing or anything," she would say.

"Cheer up, Runcie," Gregory would reply; "you're not going."

"And glad I am I'm not," she would answer.

"I wish you were, Runcie, and then we'd show you in the villages as 'The Old-Woman-Who-Can't-See-Any-Fun-in-Caravaning.' Walk up! Walk up! A penny a peep!"

She also gave Janet some lessons in frying-pan cooking.

CHAPTER V

DIOGENES AND MOSES

THE Sea View disappointment being so keenly felt, Mrs. Avory decided to give the children an extra holiday of a fortnight at once, in which to taste the delights of the caravan, and meanwhile she would herself go down to the Isle of Wight to try to find other rooms; and it was arranged that Mary Rotheram and one of her brothers and Horace Campbell should be squeezed into the party too. Jack and William Rotheram therefore tossed up for it, and Jack won.

This suddenness, as we shall see, was very fortunate, but it threw Mr. Lenox into a state of perspiration quite strange to him.

"My dear Jenny," he said to Mrs. Avory, "how am I to get a horse to do you credit, if you hurry me so? A horse is an animal requiring the most careful study. Each one of its four legs needs separate consideration. I should have liked some weeks of thought. The dog, too. Just as there is only one satisfactory horse in the world for each family, so is there only one satisfactory dog; and you ask me to get both in a few minutes."

He lay back and fanned himself.

Then he pulled two pennies from his pocket and gave them to Gregory, and told him to go to the station bookstall and bring back the *Exchange and Mart*.

The *Exchange and Mart*, as perhaps you may not know, is, without any exaggeration, the most delightful paper in the world. It contains nothing that one dislikes to read about, such as accidents, murders, suicides, politics, and criticisms of concerts; it contains nothing whatever of such things, while, on the other hand,

it is packed with matters of real interest. It tells you who has dogs for sale, and rabbits for sale, and magic-lanterns for sale, and cameras for sale, and bicycles for sale, and guinea-pigs for sale, — all at a bargain, — and it tells you also who wants to buy rabbits and cameras and guinea-pigs; and it also tells you who wants to exchange rabbits for a gun, or a dog for a fishing-rod, or a gramophone for a parrot.

Gregory brought the paper back, and Mr. Lenox at once turned to the section entitled "The Kennel," and then to the subsection "Retrievers," and he found the names of three persons who wished to sell wonderful specimens of that breed.

Two were in London and one was at Harrow.

Gregory therefore went off to find a taxicab (no easy thing at Chiswick), and, coming back with one at last, Mr. Lenox and he drove to the nearest of the London addresses.

The first was no good at all. The retrievers were all puppies, so gentle and playful that they would not have frightened even a mouse from the caravan door. But the next, which was at Bermondsey, was better. Here, in a small backyard, they found Mr. Amos, the advertiser, surrounded by kennels. He was a little man with a squint, and he declared that he had nothing but the best-bred dogs with the longest pedigrees.

A small man with a squint.

"But we don't want anything so swagger as that," said Mr. Lenox. "We want a watchdog to be kept on a chain, but friendly enough with his own people. If you keep only pedigree dogs, we may as well get on to our next address."

Mr. Amos stepped between Mr. Lenox and the door. "It's most extraordinary odd," he said, "for, although I make it almost a religion never to have any but pedigree dogs, it happens that just at this very moment I have got, for the first time in my whole career, an inferior animal. It's not mine. Oh, no; I'm only taking care of it for a friend. But it's a retriever all right, and a good one, mark you, though not a pedigree dog. My friend wants a good home for it. He's very particular about that. Kind, nice people, you know. Bones. I dare say you know him," Mr. Amos added: "Mr. Bateman, who keeps the Bricklayers' Arms."

How funny, Gregory thought, to keep bricklayers' arms! And he wondered why the bricklayers didn't keep their own arms, and who kept their legs, and he might have asked if Mr. Amos had not called to a boy named Jim to "bring Tartar over here, and look slippy."

While Jim was bringing Tartar, — who lived in a tub, and must therefore, Mr. Lenox said, be called in future Diogenes, — Mr. Amos reminded them how much more likely one is to get good watch-work from a dog who is not of the highest breeding than from a prize-winner. "As I often say," he added, "you can have too much blood; that you can. Too much blood. It's the only fault of many of my dogs."

Diogenes now stood before them, looking by no means overburdened with blood and extremely ready for a new home.

Mr. Lenox asked why Mr. Amos thought he was a good watch-dog.

"Think!" said Mr. Amos. "I don't think; I know. If Mr. Bateman was here and you were to hit him, that dog would kill you. No thinking twice, mark you. He'd just kill you."

"I hope," said Mr. Lenox, "I shall never meet Mr. Bateman in his presence. Sup-

pose I were to fall against him accidentally — how perfectly ghastly!"

"No fear of that," said Mr. Amos. "He's a clever dog. He knows the difference between an attack and a feeling of faintness. But just come down to the Bricklayers' Arms, and I'll show you."

"No, thank you," said Mr. Lenox hastily. "How much is he?"

"Three pounds," said Mr. Amos.

"Oh, come!" said Mr. Lenox. "Not for a public-house dog."

"Not a penny less," said Mr. Amos.

"Very well, then," said Mr. Lenox, "we must get on, Gregory. We have still that other address."

"Two pounds ten," said Mr. Amos.

"Oh, no," said Mr. Lenox; "much too dear. Come along, Gregory."

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Mr. Amos, "though it will be the end of my friendship with Mr. Bateman. I'll say nothing about the collar and chain, and take two pounds."

"Too dear," said Mr. Lenox, stepping to the taxi.

"Well, how much will you give?" Mr. Amos asked.

"I'll give you twenty-five shillings as he stands," said Mr. Lenox.

"He's yours," said Mr. Amos.

Mr. Lenox immediately paid the money, and then he went to a small grocer's near by and bought a bag of biscuits, and with them he and Gregory fed the famished Diogenes all the way back to Chiswick, and by the time they reached home he seemed so affectionate with them as never to have had another master.

Diogenes had come, of course, to stay; but the horse was merely to be hired. To hire a carriage-horse or a riding-horse is easy enough, but a cart-horse as strong as a steam-engine is more difficult to find.

Mr. Lenox decided to advertise, and he therefore sent the following advertisement to the *Daily Telegram:*

"Wanted — To hire for a month at least, an exceedingly powerful, gentle white horse to draw a caravan. Reply by letter. L., 'The Gables.' Chiswick."

"There," said Mr. Lenox, as he read it out, "that's as clear as crystal. No one can misunderstand that."

But, as a matter of fact, people will misunderstand anything; for on the day the advertisement appeared quite a number of men called at "The Gables," all leading horses of every size and colour. Kink was kept busy in getting rid of them, but one man succeeded in finding Robert unattended, and did all he could to persuade him that a pair of small skew-bald ponies such as he had brought with him would be far more useful in a caravan than one large cart-horse.

"Run in and tell your father that, old sport," said he. "Tell him I've got a pair of skews here as will do him credit, and he shall have the two for twenty pounds."

"No, no," said Robert; "they're no use at all. We advertised for one large, strong white horse."

Mr. Crawley was coming away from the house at this moment, and the man tackled him.

"Have the pair, mister," said the man. "They're wonderful together — draw a pantechnicon. There's lots of white on them, too. Your little boy here has taken such a fancy to them," he added. "Eighteen pound for the two."

Another man, who brought a black horse and said that white horses always had a defect somewhere, fastened on Miss Bingham.

"This is what you want, mum," he said. "Honest black. Never trust a white horse," he said. "Black's the colour. Look at this mare here — she's a beauty. Strong as an elephant and docile as a tortoise. Fifteen quid, mum, and a bargain."

"My good man," said Miss Bingham,

Strong as an Elephant and Docile as a Tortoise.

"you are labouring under a misapprehension. I require no horse."

Fortunately, among the letters were several that told of exactly the kind of horse that was needed, and one afternoon a stable-boy led into the yard a perfectly enormous creature which Mr. Lenox had hired for a pound a week from a man at Finchley.

"Warranted sound in wind and limb," said Mr. Lenox, "and his name is Moses."

Gregory, having given Moses a lump of sugar, declined ever again to wish for a motor caravan, especially as Mr. Scott slipped into his hand that evening a large knife containing eight useful articles, including a hook for extracting stones from horses' feet.

CHAPTER VI

THE PLANS

THE question where to go came next, and, compared with this, all the other preparations had been simple. Here they were, with a caravan, and a horse, and a driver, and a dog, and maps, and a map-measurer (do you know what they're called? — they're called wealemafnas), and tents, and — most of all — permission to be entirely alone; and it was not yet decided where they were going.

Of course, as you may suppose, each of the party knew where he or she wanted to go, but that was merely a private matter; no general decision had been come to.

Mr. Crawley, who may be said to have lived for golf, suggested Ashdown Forest,

and then, he said, he could look them up from time to time if they made a permanent camp there. But who wants to be looked up by a tutor when one is on a caravan holiday?

Miss Bingham was in favour of an itinerary (as she called it) that embraced two or three cathedral cities.

Mr. Lenox said: "Go to Sussex, and camp under the downs at night and explore them by day."

Mr. Scott, on the other hand, said: "Go to Berkshire and see the White Horse that Tom Hughes scoured and wrote about." And he promised to lend them the book to convert them to this project.

Mrs. Avory declined to express any opinion. "It's your caravan," she said, "and I would much rather you decided everything for yourselves." (What a delightful mother!)

Janet wanted to go to the New Forest, because she had never been there, and

now was a chance, and because for many years "The Children of the New Forest" had been her favourite story.

Robert wanted to go to Salisbury Plain and see the sun rise at Stonehenge, and cast an eye over the military operations there.

Jack Rotheram wanted to go to Hambledon, in Hampshire, to see the cradle of cricket, as it is called — the old ground on Broad Half-penny Down where they used to play cricket in tall hats, as described in John Nyren's book, which someone had given him.

Mary Rotheram wanted to go to Bredon Hill in Worcestershire, because she had always wanted to ever since she had learned a song which began:

"In summertime on Bredon
The bells they sound so clear;
Round both the shires they ring them
In steeples far and near,
A happy noise to hear.

"Here of a Sunday morning
My love and I would lie,
And see the coloured counties,
And hear the larks so high
About us in the sky."

That line about the coloured counties had always fascinated her: she had longed also to see them, lying beneath her, all spread out. The coloured counties! She talked so enthusiastically and prettily about it that she quite won over Robert, who decided that Bredon would be quite as interesting as Salisbury Plain, and would give him practice, too, in estimating square miles; so that there were two for Bredon Hill, as against one for all the other places.

Gregory, however, was not for Bredon. He wanted to see the flying-ground at Sheppey, which is in a totally different direction, and perhaps induce someone with an aëroplane to give him a lift.

Horace Campbell sided with Gregory, while Hester voted continually and feelingly for Stratford-on-Avon. To see Strat-

ford-on-Avon — that was her ideal: to walk through the same streets as her beloved Shakespeare, to see the place where his house had stood, to row on his river, to stand by his tomb!

When the time came to discuss the journey seriously, it was Hester who won. Stratford-on-Avon was decided on, with an extension to Bredon Hill as the farthest point away, returning by way of Cheltenham and Cirencester to Faringdon (for the White Horse), and then taking train for home, and leaving Kink and Moses to do the remaining seventy miles alone.

The distance from Bredon to Faringdon through Cheltenham, Cirencester, and Fairford, was roughly forty-five miles, or five days of nine miles each. Starting at Oxford, as was proposed, they would be three or four days in getting to Stratford, and two days there; three days more, at the most, in getting to Bredon. This would make eleven days altogether, which

would make, with rests on the two Sundays, and one whole day at the White Horse, the full fortnight.

This, then, is what was at last decided: that Kink should get the caravan to Oxford and be all ready for the children to join him on the Wednesday morning. They should go down to Oxford on the day before and be looked after by Mr. Lenox's young brother, who was at Oriel.

They should leave Oxford in the caravan on the next morning on their way to Stratford-on-Avon.

The distance from Oxford to Stratford was thirty-nine miles, and it was decided to do this in three days, which meant thirteen miles a day. The first night, therefore, would be spent near Woodstock, the next near Chipping Norton, and the third near Shipston down in the green meadows on the banks of the Stour. At Stratford they would find Mrs. Avory waiting for them, and stay with her at

the Shakespeare Hotel for a day or so. By that time they would know exactly how much or how little they liked the caravan, and what things were necessary; and then Mrs. Avory would go back and they would begin their real adventures. Could anything be better? Although, of course, Robert was very contemptuous of the Shakespeare Hotel part of the programme. "The idea of sleeping in a bed!" he said.

The next thing to do was to apportion the various duties. Kink, of course, was arranged for; he was to drive and to look after the horse and sleep as near the caravan as could be managed; while Diogenes was always to be on guard. Kink also was to see about water.

Janet was purser and steward. She had to decide what food was wanted, and to keep the money. Hester was the official letter-writer, and was under a promise to write home every other evening. Robert

was the guide and geographer; he kept the maps. He was also the telegraphist. Mary Rotheram, who had taken lessons in cooking, was chief cook, and she was to be helped by Janet. Jack was superintendent of the washing-up, and Horace Campbell was his principal ally. (How tired they got of it!) Jack, Horace, and Robert were carriers between the grocer's, the butcher's, the baker's, and the Slow-coach.

It was arranged that Gregory, being the smallest and weakest, and therefore the least likely to be refused, should go on and ask leave of the farmers on whose land it was proposed to rest the caravan at night. Mary Rotheram should be his companion, and ask for eggs and milk at the same time.

Next came the victualling, and this was exceedingly interesting, although it made great holes in the sovereign box. Janet and Mary Rotheram sat for hours over the

Stores List, and they were continually taking important questions to Collins.

"How many tins of mustard ought we to take? A dozen at fourpence?"

"Mustard, Miss Mary? Why, two

Janet and Mary studying the Stores List.

penny ones would be enough for a month."

(Three and tenpence saved, you see.)

"I say, Collins, how long do eggs boil?"

"Collins, you have to prick sausages, don't you, or else they burst?"

"Collins, how many loaves do eight people want a day?"

"Four, Miss Janet, at the least — large ones."

"Including Kink?" Janet explained.

"Oh, Kink too! Five, then, if not six, the old gormandizer."

"Collins, what's the best part of beef for stewing?"

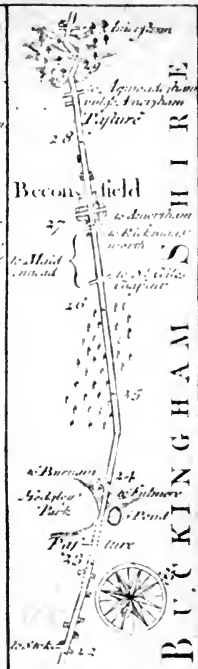
"Collins, you can put anything into a stew, can't you? Absolutely anything?"

"Collins, if you've put too much pepper into a thing, is there any way of getting it out again?"

Mrs. Avory was very particular about tinned things. "You must have plenty of tongues," she said, "in case the fire won't burn or the meat is too tough;" and privately she instructed Kink to keep an eye on their eating. "They must eat, Kink, don't forget. Never mind what they say; make them eat sensibly." To the stores Mrs. Avory herself added a number

of tongues and a good deal of plain chocolate.

The day for Kink's departure — at least three days before the others were to leave — at last arrived, and by eleven o'clock everything was ready: Kink was seated on the shafts, with the reins in one hand, and in the other an ancient map of the road from London to Oxford, which Robert had found in one of his father's Road Books, of which there were many in the library, and had carefully traced. It was called *Britannia Depicta; or, "Ogilby" Improved*, 1753, and, so that you may see what kind of help Kink was offered, I have had the map reproduced here. Kink, I may say, having some difficulty in reading even the plain print of the morning paper, held the tracing in his hand only so far as he was in sight. He then folded it up and placed it in his pocket, and when he was in any doubt as to the way, asked the first person he met.



Uxbridge
a Large Town Containing about 200 Houses. Gives Title of Earl to Henry Ld Paget Created Earl 1715. Has a Good Market on Thursday & 2 Fairs Annually
[at 19]

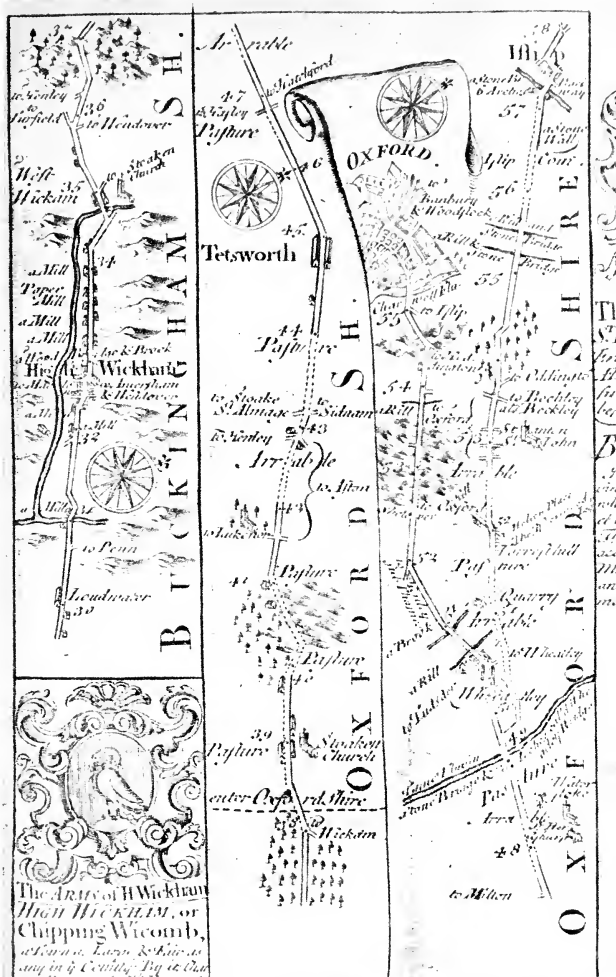
S. Arms of SOUTHWARK

S. Arms of LONDON

The DEANARY of WESTMINSTR
Erected by Eliz. ID 1560. Wil. Bill, D.D. sometime Master of St. Johns Coll. then Master of Trinity Coll. constituted first Dean. —

See the Description of the Cities of London & Westminster, & ye Borough of Southwark, beginning in Page 41 & continued in Pages 44, 47, 59, 68, 71, 74, 77, 84, 87, 101.

S. Arms of WESTMINSTER



The Deanary of St. Pauls London
Erected by ——
AD. — Leovegarus
first Dean, sometime
before ye Conquest

Beconsfield

Is observable for having been the place where the famous Poet Waller had a Seat. The Town is well accomodated, has a Market on Wednesday and Fairs on Candlemas day & Holy Thurs. [at 2d.]

The Arms of H. Wickham
High Wickham, or
Chipping Wicomb,
a Town a Large & Fair as any in ye County. By its Charter Renew'd ye 6th Year of King James ye 1st is Governd by a Major, 12 Aldermen, 2 Bayliffs, has an Excellent Corn-Market on Fridays. There is a Free Grammar School, and Almsd. Houses Maintain'd out of Lands, Formerly belonging to ye Hospital of St. John, in this Town; but upon the Dissolution of Religious Houses given for the aforesaid Use by Queen Elizabeth ye 4th Year of her Reign.

The Bishoprick of London Containing 5 Counties of Middlesex, Essex, part of Hartford, & therein 622 Parsons, was founded by Ethelbert K. of Kent, AD. 604. St. Milelus constituted first Bp. Town likewise belongs all ye British Plantations in America. Yearly Value £1000. Seats at London House in Aldersgate-Street London & Fulham House in Middlesex.

Mr. Lenox and Mr. Scott were both there in time to see the start of the Slowcoach, as they had decided to call it. Also present at the start was the greater part of adult Chiswick and all its children, who filled the street opposite "The Gables" and cheered. Kink accepted their enthusiasm with calm, but as he said afterwards to Collins, "I felt like the Prince of Wales and all the royal family."

Both Mr. Scott and Mr. Lenox brought contributions to the Slowcoach's stores. Mr. Scott's was a large bundle of firelighters and twelve dozen boxes of matches. "You can't have too many matches," he said. Mr. Lenox's was ointment for blisters.

Uncle Christopher was also there to see the start, and he brought with him an envelope. "This envelope," he said, "is not to be opened unless you're in any very serious difficulty. Then open it."

And so, in a scene of wild excitement, Kink cracked his whip, Moses strained at the collar, the Slowcoach creaked heavily out of the yard, and its historic journey was begun.

The first day.

CHAPTER VII

MR. LENOX'S YOUNG BROTHER

Mr. Lenox's young brother met the party on the Oxford platform. He was accompanied by two of his friends, who were dressed in grey flannels and straw hats, and were smoking very large and beautiful pipes. Mr. Lenox's young brother introduced these friends as Fizzy and Shrimp, and then they packed themselves into three hansoms and drove off.

Mr. Lenox's young brother led the way with Janet and Mary. Fizzy (at least, Hester thought it was Fizzy, but it may have been Shrimp) came next with Hester, Horace, and Gregory; and then came Shrimp (unless it was Fizzy) with Robert and Jack.

Oxford hansoms are the worst in the world, but seldom has a ride been more delightful. The three hosts pointed out the colleges as they passed, until they came, far too soon, to the Mitre, where they were to sleep.

"Now take your things upstairs and make sure where your rooms are, and tidy up if you want to," said Mr. Lenox's young brother, "and then hop down, and we'll take you to see the caravan, and show you about a little, and perhaps go on the river; and in the evening we're going to have supper in my rooms. Fizzy's going to conjure, and perhaps we'll have charades."

These words made tidying-up an even simpler matter than usual, and the party started off.

Kink, it seems, had reached Oxford that morning, and was at the Green Man, where the Slowcoach was an object of extraordinary interest to the neighbourhood. They found him seated on the top

step reading the paper, while forty-five children (at least) stared at him. Diogenes lay at the foot of the steps.

Kink was very glad to see them. No, he said, he hadn't had any adventures exactly, but driving a caravan was no work for a modest man who wished for a quiet life among vegetables.

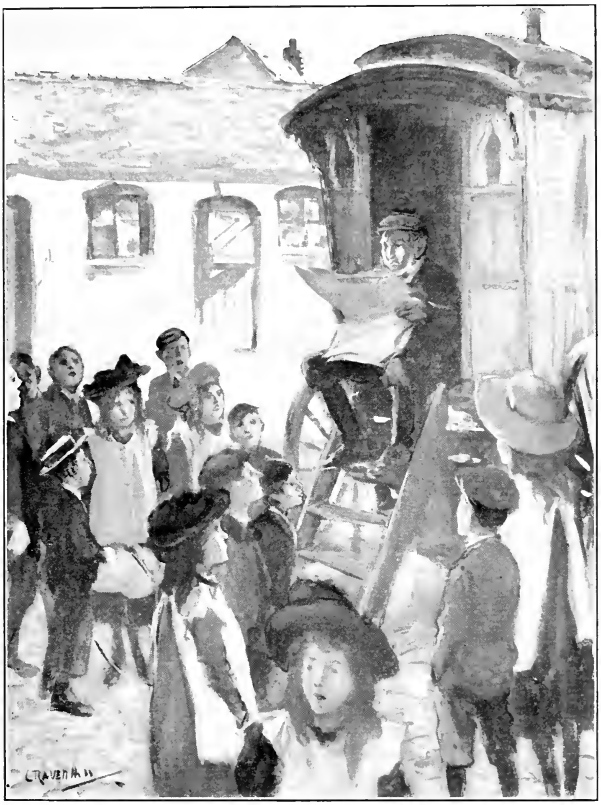
"This," he said, waving his pipe at the increasing crowd, "is nothing. You should have see them at Beaconsfield and High Wycombe. They began by thinking I was Lord John Sanger, and when they were satisfied that I wasn't, they made sure I was a Cheap Jack with gold watches for a shilling each."

"How does it go, Kink?" Robert asked.

"It goes all right," said Kink, "but the crockery wants muffling. You can't hear yourself think when you trot."

"And Diogenes?"

"Diogenes," said Kink, "is a masterpiece. He begins to growl at tramps when



The Gardener sitting on the Caravan Steps reading the Paper.

they're half a mile away. Why is it, I wonder," Kink added, "that dogs can't abide ragged clothes? This Oxford, they tell me, 's a clever place. I wonder if anyone here can explain that?"

Mr. Lenox's young brother and his friends had now to be shown the Slowcoach, which they pronounced "top hole," and then Moses was inspected in his stable; and, this being done, they were ready for the river — or, rather, for the ices at a pastrycook's shop in the High Street — called the High — which were, to precede the river.

Then they all trooped down to the boats and had a perfect hour's rowing; and then they explored Oxford a little, and saw Tom Quad at Christ Church (or "The House," as it is called), and were shown the rooms in which the author of "Alice in Wonderland" lived for so many years; and so right up through the city to Magdalen Grove, where the deer live, and Magdalen Tower,

on the top of which the May Day carols are sung.

Mr. Lenox's young brother lived in rooms outside his college; he would not enter the college until next term. They were in Oriel Lane, and exceedingly comfortable, with at least twenty pipes in a pipe-rack on the wall, and at least thirty photographs of his favourite actresses, chiefly Pauline Chase, and five cricket-bats in the corner, and about forty walking-sticks, and a large number of puzzles of the "Pigs in Clover" type, which nearly drove Gregory mad while supper was being prepared.

The preparation consisted merely of the entrance of one man after another carrying silver dishes; for everything was cold, although exceedingly sumptuous and solid. There were chickens all covered with a beautiful thick whitewash, on which little hearts and stars cut out of truffles were sprinkled. There was a tongue all over varnish, like the dainty foot of a giant

Cinderella. There were custards and tarts and jellies. There were also bottles exactly like champagne bottles, which, however, contained ginger ale, and for Mr. Lenox's young brother and his friends there were silver tankards of beer. It was, in short, not a supper, but, as Mary Rotheram expressed it, using her favourite adjective at the moment, a supreme banquet.

Then another friend, with spectacles, called the Snarker, came in, and they began. Mr. Lenox's young brother was a very attentive host, and made everyone eat too much. Then he made a speech to propose the health of the Slowcoaches, as he called them, and to wish them a prosperous journey. "That you will all be happy," he said, very gravely, in conclusion, "is our earnest wish. But the one thing which my friends and I desire more than any other — and I assure you that they are with me most cordially in this sentiment (aren't you, Fizzy? aren't you, Shrimp? aren't you, Snarker?) — the

one thing that we desire more than any other is, that you may never be run in for exceeding the speed limit." This was a very successful joke.

After supper came Fizzy's conjuring tricks, which were not very bewildering to children who had once had a real conjurer from the Stores, as these had, and then a charade played by Mary, Horace, Fizzy, and Shrimp for the others to guess.

The first act represented a motorist (Fizzy) who ran over and killed an old woman (Mary), and was arrested by a policeman (Horace), and fined eighteenpence by a magistrate (Shrimp).

The second was a cockney scene in which two costers (Fizzy and Shrimp) took their girls (Mary and Horace) to Hampstead Heath to 'ave fun.

The third was Henry VIII. (Shrimp) receiving Anne of Cleves (Fizzy) and her Maid of Honour (Mary), and telling Wolsey (Horace) to prepare the divorce, because she was a "great Flanders mare."

You see the whole word, of course — Car-'ave-Anne.

Finally the Snarker said that they must play one writing game before they went home. The Snarker, it seemed, came from a family which was devoted to writing games, and had even made improvements in "Consequences," which is, when you all know each other extremely well, the best writing game of all. But among strangers, as the Snarker explained, it was not so good, because they can't understand the jokes against uncles and aunts.

They did not, therefore, play "Consequences," but instead wrote what the Snarker called "composite stories." That is to say, they each took a large sheet of paper and began at the top a story, writing as much as they could in two minutes. Then the paper was passed on, and the story continued by the next person, until all had had one turn. Then the original beginners each finished his story, and they were read out.

As there were eleven playing, this meant there were eleven stories; but I will copy only one of them. (Janet kept the papers, or I should not be able to do that.)

This is the one which was begun by Hester, who liked to be serious and mysterious in her work, and was almost vexed when others turned it to nonsense. She called it "The Secret of the Castle," and began it like this:

"It was a dark and gloomy night in the year 1135, when the young Lord Almeric reached his impressive and ancestral home. Nothing could be heard but the sighing of the wind in the turrets and the moaning of Boris, the great wolfhound. Lord Almeric had ridden far, and was tired, and the gloominess of his ancestral home weighed on his spirits, which were naturally buoyant and high. Flinging himself from his gaily comparisoned horse, and tossing the rein with a muttered, 'Here, varlet!' to the waiting groom, he opened the massive doors

and entered the hall. What was his amazement to see ——"

"Time!" called the Snarker, who had his watch before him, and Hester had to stop.

Gregory came next. His idea of the game was not very clear, to begin with, and he had some difficulty in reading what was written, so he was able to write very little, and that not too helpfully. He therefore wrote words that were always near his heart:

"— a flying-machine."

and that was all.

Then came Janet. Always wishing to be kind and make things easy, she longed to get the story back into the spirit and period of poor little romantic Hester's opening passages. But Gregory had spoiled everything. Janet, however, did her best:

"The young lord drew back with a start, for he could hardly believe his eyes.

'What,' he exclaimed, 'is this strange mixture of wires and wings? Can my father's astrologer have really done it at last after all these fruitless years? He must indeed have been busy since I rode forth to battle. Eftsoons, do I dream or wake?' He touched the strange thing cautiously, but it did not bite, and gradually there came upon him an exceeding desire to fly. 'By my halidom,' he cried, 'I will e'en inquire further into this mystery——'"

Next came Fizzy, who was bent on being funny at any cost. He wrote:

"—as the man said, sticking his fork into the German sausage. 'What ho, my merry minions, help!' he cried; 'let us draw forth the areoplane into the home meadow, for I would fain experiment with it. A lord is no lord unless he can daunt the swallow and the pigeon. So saying, he rang the alarm-bell, which was only kept for fires and burglaries, and summoned the household. 'A murrain on ye

for being so pestilent slow!' he shouted. 'Gadsooth, ye knaves! let loose the petrol, or I soar not into the zenith.'"

Then came Mary, who naturally had no patience with nonsense. She ignored Fizzy's contribution completely, and got back to romance:

"Meanwhile, seated in her room in the home turret sat the lovely Lady Elfrida, the picture of woe. Why did her lord tarry? Had she not heard him ride into the courtyard and give his palfrey to the waiting serf? Yet where was he? He was wont to spring up the stairs lightly as a roebuck of the mountains to welcome her, and now where was he? Little did she guess ——"

Here Shrimp took the paper and wrote:

"— that a brand-new monoplane was blocking up the stairs, so big that not a roebuck on earth could jump it. But

what of the secret of the castle? Was that the secret? No. Why did the wind shriek and the deerhound moan? If you would know this, reader, come with me down the dungeon steps and unbar yonder dark door. For there in the dark recess of that terrible cell lay ——"

The Shrimp, even although time had not been called, was very glad to leave off here. Robert took the paper. He read the narrative as well as he could, and added these words:

"But I cannot bring my pen to write the word. It was a secret; indeed, the secret of the castle. No wonder that the dog moaned and the wind howled and the Lady Elfrida grieved."

The Snarker, who, after all, had begun the wretched game, and whose duty it was, therefore, to pull this ruin of a story together again, ought to have played fair; but instead he went back to what Fizzy

had called an "areoplane," spelling not being taught at Oxford. He therefore wrote:

"And meanwhile, what of the aëroplane? Fortunately, the night was short, and there was soon enough light by which to fly, and in a brief time the seneschals and myrmidons had the great machine in the midst of the tourney-ground, all ready for flight. Lord Almeric seated himself and grasped the lever. A firm push from the willing arms of a hundred carles and hinds, and he was in the air. 'Ah,' he cried, 'odds bodkins, this is indeed life! Never have I felt such sensations. I will never walk or ride again. I will sell my motor-car and my horses and my boots. Flying for me for ever!'"

Jack now took the paper:

"Lord Almeric was always a very clever man, and it was nothing to him that he had never flown before. He had studied the pictures of the flying men in the

illustrated papers while waiting at the dentist's, and he knew the principles of mechanics. No wonder, then, that he flew with perfect control, circling the home turret, where the Lady Elfrida was still weeping, with the greatest ease, and calling to her messages of comfort, which ——"

Here the Snarker called "Time!" again, and Mr. Lenox's young brother took the paper:

"— she could not hear. 'Come down, good lord, or of a verity thou wilt fall and crack thy coxcomb!' shouted the major-domo from beneath; but the intrepid Almeric heeded not the warning, and only rose higher and higher, nearer and nearer to the stars. And then, suddenly, there was an awful shriek, and his body was seen to be hurtling steadily and surely towards the earth, gaining speed with every revolution. 'Help, help!' they cried; 'he must be dashed to pieces; nothing can save him.' But at that moment —— "

Here Horace had to go on. He was not a literary boy, and it took him more than one minute to read all that had gone before. All he could therefore add was:

"—he woke up. 'Where am I?' he said. 'You have fallen out of bed,' said Lady Elfrida."

Poor Hester! her face was a picture of perplexity and indignation when she came to read the story all through. There was clearly no sensible ending possible, and she therefore merely wrote:

"Not to this day has the secret of the Castle been solved, but visitors are still shown, on payment of a shilling each, the place where Lord Almeric dreamed he fell from a flying-machine in the year 1135."

And then Mr. Lenox's young brother and his friends took them back to the Mitre, and said good-night.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST DAY

Mr. Lenox's young brother gave them a tremendous breakfast, and called in Fizzy and Shrimp and the Snarker to help, and then Janet paid the bill at the Mitre and bought a few things, including two cold chickens, and they all went down to the little inn yard together and found Kink waiting for them.

Janet, whose duties as paymaster had now begun in earnest, also paid Kink's bill; Robert set his pedometer at zero; and the whole party started, followed by the crowd of idle men and children to which they were destined to become so accustomed. For a caravan with people in it who are not gipsies is still an excitement in England.

Kink drove and the others walked behind, or by the side, or in front — mostly in front, for it was soon discovered that Moses had a slower walk than any other of the party — in fact, two miles an hour was more than his rate, although Kink assured them that he could trot from four to five on the level, and keep it up.

It was a fine but rather windy day, and the dust flew about a little too much; but everything was too fresh and exciting for that to matter. What is a little dust on the first day of a caravan expedition!

Mr. Lenox's young brother and his jolly friends turned back at Wolvercot, as there was work to do even at Oxford. It was not until their last waving handkerchiefs were out of sight that the children really felt themselves at the start of their adventurous enterprise. In fact, Robert put the feeling into words. "Now we're beginning," he said.

Up to this time all had walked; but,

glancing at Gregory's lagging legs, Janet soon began to assume the little mother once again. In consultation with Kink, it was decided that on fairly level roads Moses was equal to the Slowcoach *plus* four passengers, and it was therefore agreed that there should never be more than that number riding at once, but, in order that no one should be too tired, they should take it in turns to enjoy these short periods of ease.

Janet.

The arrangement made it necessary to appoint a new officer, who was called the Regulator of Rests, and Mary Rotheram was chosen. Her duties were not quite as simple as they sound, because Gregory, being the youngest, and Hester, being not

very much older and not very strong, were to have more rides than anyone else; Kink also must be allowed to ride a good deal. And this meant a little calculation; but Mary was always good at arithmetic.

Gregory, of course, refused point blank to ride a single yard; but he was rarely sorry, none the less, when the time came to climb the steps and settle down in a chair.

They had lunch that first day near Yarnton, without making any camp or cooking anything. The cooking was to be saved for the evening. They merely tore the two cold chickens to pieces and ate them with bread-and-butter and stone ginger beer from an inn beside the road. It is much the best way with a cold chicken. Afterwards bananas, which someone had told Mrs. Avory were the most sustaining of fruit.

Robert had arranged an easy day to begin with, and they were to go no farther

than Woodstock, where, for those not too tired, there was Blenheim to see, the wonderful house of the Duke of Marlborough, and Fair Rosamond's Bower, and the park and the lake. Hester even had hopes of finding a distressed Blenheim spaniel puppy in some romantic sort of way, and adopting it for life.

But there were none of these things for them. Indeed, caravaners very soon get out of the habit of making plans at all. It is all too uncertain. The only things that really are certain are work and delay. They got no nearer to Blenheim than to peer through its gates and to recite, very imperfectly, the verses about old Caspar's work and little Wilhelmine.

At about half-past three they entered Woodstock, and, after passing through the village and doing a little shopping there, surrounded by all Woodstock's children who were not in school, they began to look about for a camping-place. And this

needs more thought than one might suppose, for there must be some shelter from the wind, and water must not be too distant. Also one does not want to be very close to a busy and dusty road.

Kink, who had gone off on a little tour of inspection, came back at last and said he had found an excellent field, high and dry, and sheltered too. Stopping a labourer, they found that the farmer was Mr. Gosden, of Blackett's; and Gregory and Mary Rotheram hurried off to the farm-house, which was a few fields off, to ask permission, and get some milk, and perhaps eggs and butter.

They found the door of the kitchen open, but no one there. It was a large, low kitchen, with a very red brick floor, and it led into the dairy, where they could see the flat pans of milk. The fire was burning so brightly that they knew the farmer's wife could not be far away. Over the mantelpiece was a gun. Two or three highly polished and highly coloured grocer's

calendars—pictures of beautiful women—were on the walls. Sides of bacon hung from the ceiling. The whole place smelled of wood smoke and plenty. The children noticed all these things as they stood in the doorway, every now and then knocking.

At last they heard steps, and a very wide and smiling woman entered the kitchen from another door.

"Well," she asked, "what can I do for you?"

Gregory, proud to be really beginning his duties, said: "Please, may we camp to-night in one of your fields? We're living in a caravan."

"You've come to the wrong person," said Mrs. Gosden. "That's my husband's affair, and he's rather particular. He's gone to Chipping Norton; but," she added, as Gregory began to look miserable, "he'll be back any minute now. You sit down and have a cup of tea with me and wait for him."

So they sat down, and Mrs. Gosden made the tea, which she took from a highly coloured tin, covered also with beautiful women, and they had with it bread-and-butter and lettuce, and talked.

"And how do you like gipsying?" Mrs. Gosden asked.

"I think it's going to be splendid," Mary said; "but we've only just begun."

"Then you haven't slept hout before?"

"No," said Mary.

"My word!" said Mrs. Gosden; "what sore throats you'll have in the morning! Roughing it 's all very well by day, but give me a comfortable bed to lay in of a night. That's me!"

At this moment the sound of wheels was heard, and Mrs. Gosden jumped up and added some hot water to the tea and cut some more bread-and-butter. "That's father," she said, and Mr. Gosden soon after came in.

He was a big man with whiskers under

his chin all the way round, but none on the rest of his face.

"Hello!" he said; "visitors!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Gosden, "a young lady and gentleman who are living in a caravan, and want to camp in the hay takers. At least, I think it's the hay takers from what they say of it."

"Ho, do they?" said Mr. Gosden. "A nice state of things," he added with a twinkle, "when hevery one who comes to hask leave to spoil one of my fields gets a nice tea given them!" and he laughed.

"We shouldn't spoil it," said Gregory.

"Well," said Mr. Gosden, "perhaps you'll tell me how you make a fire. Isn't it on the ground? And what do you do with your rubbish? Clean it up and take it along with you? Not too likely. I've had caravaners here before."

"We will," said Mary, "I promise"—seeing as she spoke the necessity of a new official being appointed at once: the Remover of Camp Litter.

"I said the other day," continued the farmer, "that never again would I let a caravan into my fields, didn't I, Bet? And how can I go back on that?"

"You did say it," said Mrs. Gosden, true enough, but you're halways breaking your word. You said you'd bring me a new halarm clock the next time you went to Oxford, and I've never got it yet, and that's months ago."

"Never mind," said Mr. Gosden; "it means longer in bed for you. Well," he added to Mary, "I'll come down with you and look at the turnout and see. But I must finish my tea first."

Never, thought Mary, could anyone have eaten so much tea or taken so long over it, and she was in despair about the others waiting in the road, hungry and impatient; but there was nothing for it but to be quiet, and at last Mr. Gosden was ready.

The others, it was true, had become

very tired of waiting, but they had spent some of the time in bringing water from the nearest cottage. No one who gets really cross from waiting should ever go away in a caravan. Mr. Gosden had a good look at all of them and at Kink before he said anything. He then gave them leave to camp very near the hedge, and he asked them to promise to be gone by ten the next morning, as he had some cattle coming in, and to clear up thoroughly, and then off he went. He stepped back to tell them to come up to the farm in the morning for milk and butter and to report on their night, and started off once more.

Gregory, who had clearly been puzzling over something, ran after him.

"Well?" said Mr. Gosden.

"Where do they take the hay?" Gregory said.

"Who?" Mr. Gosden asked.

"The hay takers," said Gregory.

"I don't understand," said Mr. Gosden.

"What hay takers? It's not a hay meadow. We graze it."

"Mrs. Gosden," said Gregory, "called the field the hay takers."

Mr. Gosden laughed loudly. "That's my missis's pronounciation," he said. "She's much too fond of haitches: she will put them in the wrong place. I hoften correct her, but it's no huse. It's nothing to do with hay. It's the size of the field — the size, don't you see? The height acres: that's what she meant to say, bless her old heart!"

CHAPTER IX

THE FIRST NIGHT

"WELL," said Janet, "that's a very nice start. It would have been horrid if the first farmer had been crusty."

"Ah," said Mary Rotheram, "but you should see his wife! It was she who did it for us really. Perhaps after dinner we might walk up there to thank her."

After dinner! How recklessly young caravaners can talk. But you shall hear. . . .

Kink with much skill got Moses and the Slowcoach into the field and shut the gate, and then the great carriage rocked and swayed over the grass, making no sound but a mixture of creaking and crockery. At last he brought it to a stand just under a tall hedge, and Moses was at once

taken out and roped to a crowbar driven in the ground.

"The first thing," said Janet, "is the fire," and Jack and Horace were sent off to collect wood and pile it near the Slow-coach, and fix the tripod over it. As it was quite dry, one of Mr. Scott's lighters soon had it blazing, and Mary, as chief cook, threw quickly into the water in the pot the large piece of brisket they had bought at Woodstock, together with potatoes and carrots and little onions and pepper and salt.

That done, and leaving Horace with strict orders to keep the fire fed, the others began to unpack. First of all mackintosh sheets and rugs were thrown on the ground round the fire, and then Robert and Jack drew out their tent and set it up on the farther side of the fire, some four or five yards away, so that the fire was midway between the tent and the caravan.

The tent was similar to those which

gipsies use — not with a central pole, but stretched over half-hoops which were stuck in the ground. It was wide enough for three boys to lie comfortably in their sleeping-bags side by side. Gregory was to sleep in the caravan with the girls; Kink was to go to Woodstock.

Meanwhile, with all of them, except Mary and Gregory, who had done well with Mrs. Gosden's tea, the pangs of hunger were at work, and the steam of the great iron pot hanging over the fire did nothing to allay them. Mary and Janet every now and then thrust a fork into the meat, but its resistance to the point was heart-breaking.

"Hadn't you better have some biscuits to go on with?" Janet said at last; but the others refused. It would spoil the stew, they thought.

"At any rate," Janet said, "let's get everything ready, not only for supper," — you see, it wasn't called dinner any longer, — "but for washing-up afterwards."

So Kink went off for some more water, and a large basin was set on a box, and dishcloths were put by it; and a rackety search began for plates, and knives and forks, and mugs, and tinned fruits, and more plates and spoons and moist sugar, and all the other things which appear on our tables at mealtimes as naturally as leaves on the trees, but which in a caravan mean so much fuss and perplexity. In fact, all the children returned home with a vastly increased respect for the ability and punctuality of Collins and Eliza Pollard and Jane Masters.

For a while the air was simply full of questions and remarks, some of which I copy down, and you may guess who asked them.

"I say, Janet, where's the tin-opener?"

"Janet, dear, ought we to have napkins?"

"Hester, you little nuisance, get off that box; it's got the bread in it."

"Hester, stop reading and come and help."

"Horace, the fire's nearly out."

"I wish some of you would stop talking and tell me where the tin-opener is."

"Jack, you lazy ruffian, why don't you get some more sticks?"

"I say, Kink, do you think this old brisket will ever be done?"

"Kink, does it ruin potatoes and things to stew too long?"

"Kink, is there any decent way of opening a tin without a tin-opener?"

"I'm perfectly certain the sugar was in this cupboard. Gregory, have you been at the sugar?"

"It's a good deal harder than a rock, still."

"Can you make a tin-opener out of a fork?"

"I am perfectly certain I saw the corkscrew this morning."

"Oh, I say, I didn't come out in this old caravan to die of hunger and neglect."

"Mary, where did you put the milk-jug?"

"Let's have that beast of a brisket out and cut him up, and put him in again in smaller pieces."

"Oh, Jack, how clever you are! However did you think of that?"

"I expect it's hunger sharpening his wits."

"I say, it's all very well to say cut him up small; but he's red hot. I'm scalded horribly."

"So am I."

"Yes, and so am I, the way you make him jump about. It splashed right over here."

"Kink, come and help us hold the brisket down while we cut him up."

The result of all this confusion was the appointment of two or three new officials. Horace was made Keeper of the Tin-opener, and Gregory Keeper of the Cork-screw, while Jack was given the title of

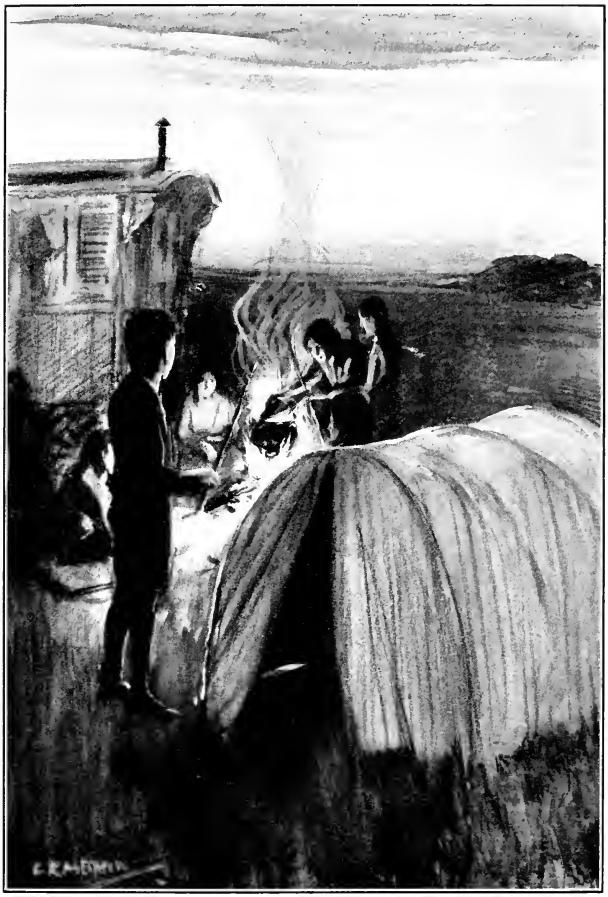
Preserver of Enough Oil in the Beatrice Stove, because you can do wonders with a Beatrice stove while waiting for the real fire to burn up — but only if there's oil in it.

Jack's brilliant device of slicing the brisket was successful, and by half-past seven they were seated on their rugs round the fire eating the most supreme stew of the century, as Mary Rotheram called it. They ate it in soup-plates, with a great deal of juice, into which they dropped their bread.

Suddenly old Kink, who had been eating steadily for a quarter of an hour just outside the circle, stepped up to what we may call the supper-table, with his watch in his hand.

"Miss Janet," he said, "there's only a quarter of an hour to get to Woodstock to send off the telegram."

Janet looked at the official telegraphist in alarm. "Oh, Bobbie," she said, "how



The Most Supreme Stew of the Century.

dreadful if we had missed it! You must simply run!"

Robert sprang to his feet in a moment.

"Give me a shilling," he said. "I'll make it up as I go along. Keep some tinned pears for me."

"I'll come too," said Jack, and off they bolted.

They reached the post-office just in time to despatch this message:

"*Avory Gables Chiswick just finished glorious brisket all well love.*"

On their return Robert and Jack found washing-up in full swing, and were not sorry to be able to eat their pears in comfort and watch the others being busy.

The light was now going fast; the bats flitted over their heads, and there was no sound save the talking and clattering of the washers-up and the grinding of Diogenes's teeth on the brisket bone. Various projects for spending the last hours of the day had been talked of, but now

that it was here no one seemed to have the slightest energy left either to walk into Blenheim Park or cross the three or four fields to Blackett's. In fact, they wanted but one thing, and that was to creep into their very novel beds and see what it was like to sleep like gipsies.

Everything was therefore put ready for breakfast. A last load of wood was brought for the fire, Diogenes was transferred to the long rope which enabled him to range all round the camp, and Kink said good night and trudged off to the village inn.

And so the first night began.

Gregory was a little fractious for a while, considering it an indignity to be sleeping in the caravan instead of with the men; but he was no sooner tucked into his berth than he fell asleep and forgot the insult. The girls were also very soon on their little shelves, either sleeping or drowsily enjoying the thought of sleep; but Robert and Jack and Horace did not hurry. The fire

was still warm, and they huddled round it with Diogenes, and talked, and listened to Moses crunching the grass, and made plans for the morrow. Then at last they carried the sheeting and the rugs to the tent, and crept into their sacks and prepared to sleep.

With the exception of Gregory, no one slept very well. Hester was frightened by an owl which hooted close to the caravan, and Janet had to hold her hand for quite a long time, which is a very uncomfortable thing to do when you are in the berth below, and then, just as she was going off again, a rabbit, pursued by a stoat, screamed right under their wheels, as it seemed, and Hester's fright began anew.

Jack and Horace were probably a little over excited, for they were very restless; and to be restless on the hard ground — with no springs, as in our beds at home — is to get sore and wakeful; while Robert was intently conscious of every sound —

and if you sleep in a field you hear thousands of them — all the rustlings of the little shy nocturnal animals, tiny squeakings and shrillings in the grass, as well as the cries of the birds of prey. Now and then, too, a spider ran over his face and made him jump, and very early the strong light poured into the mouth of the tent and made it seem absurd to be in bed any longer.

The result was, that it was not till the morning that they began to sleep properly at all, and that made them much less ready to get up than they had expected to be.

CHAPTER X

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SECOND CARAVAN

The arrival of Kink at half-past six was a great relief. Robert hailed him, and Kink said it was a beautiful morning.

"Don't you get up yet," he said, after Robert and Janet had both told him of the night. "I'll make the fire and boil the kettle, and fetch water, and so on, and you get up when I tell you. Otherwise, you'll all be too tired and get ill."

And so they had the blessed experience of lying still and drowsy, and hearing Kink move about for their comfort.

The boys were up first, and made extremely noisy toilets in the washing-up basin, and then Jack and Gregory went off to the farm for milk and butter and

eggs, and Mrs. Gosden, who seemed, early as it was, to be in the very middle of a day's work, and who refused to believe that the boys were not deceiving her when they denied having sore throats, gave them leave to gather strawberries, so that their return to the Slowcoach was a new triumph.

Their breakfast was chiefly scrambled eggs, ham, and strawberries, and by ten o'clock, true to their bargain, they were out of the field and on the highroad, and no sign of their camp remained, save a black circle caused by the fire and a slight crushing of the grass all round it.

They had gone a very little way before Robert, who had already been to Woodstock with the morning telegram, began to realize that he was in for a blister on his left heel, and, on asking the others, he found that they were not too comfortable either.

"This means," he told Mary, speaking to her in her official capacity of Regula-

tor of Rests, "that we shall have to ride a good deal, because we simply must go twelve miles to-day, or we shan't be at Stratford in time for mother to-morrow afternoon."

Mary therefore ordered them in and out of the Slowcoach with great frequency, but it was not a great deal of use, for they hobbled more and more.

At Enstone they stopped for lunch, which consisted of a tongue and bananas and ginger beer; and here they met a friendly tinker, drinking his ale outside the inn, who, noticing their lameness, gave them some good advice. "If you can't stop and rest," he said, "you should soap your stockings, and it's a good thing now and then to change the stockings from left to right.

They found that the soap was really useful, and got on much better, and a little later they were overtaken by two young men on a walking tour, who slowed down to

fall into step for a while with Robert and Jack. One gave them some hints. "When you are very tired," he said, "it helps to hold something in front of you at full length — even a walking-stick will do, or a coat rolled up. It pulls you along. You look an idiot, of course, but that doesn't matter. No one who minds looking foolish will ever have a really good time. It is a good thing to prevent a stitch in your side to carry a little pebble in your mouth. Squeezing a cork in each hand helps."

"Another way to make walking easier," said the other young man, "is to sing as you go. All sing together — marching songs, if you know any, such as 'Tramp, boys, tramp.' That's what soldiers do on long marches, and it makes all the difference."

They didn't take the road to Chipping Norton, but stopped at the town, while Kink, who had no blisters, went into the town to get the evening's dinner; and meanwhile Janet persuaded the Beatrice stove to give

them tea. It was while here that they had their first experience of Diogenes as a guardian, for he frightened away two tramps who seemed likely to be troublesome.

He frightened away two tramps who seemed likely to be troublesome.

On Kink's return, Robert urged them on, for he had marked down on his map a spot called the Hollow, about five miles farther on, near Long Compton, which sounded exceedingly attractive as a camping-ground, especially to one who had read

"Lavengro" and remembered the Dingle there, near Long Melton; and hither, very footsore, but still brave and happy, they came about half-past four, and made a very snug camp in it without asking anyone's leave.

It was not time for supper, and they were very glad to lie about and be lazy while the stew was slowly cooking. Robert and Janet and Mary consulted very deeply about the morrow, and at last decided that it would be best to remain there all the day and get their blisters cured with Mr. Lenox's ointment, and therefore a telegram would have to go to Mrs. Avory at once, telling her not to go to Stratford till Saturday, "and also," Robert added, "to bring my bicycle. We can easily fasten it on the roof, and it's going to be frightfully necessary often and often. This evening, for instance. Here we are, goodness knows how far from a telegraph-office, and everyone lame except Kinky, who'll have to go."

Kink, however, had luck, for he met a baker's cart on its way to Chipping Norton, and the man not only said he would take the telegram and the letter, but he agreed to bring out a number of things to eat the next day.

Feeling rested and well fed, they therefore went to bed that Thursday night much more likely to sleep than on the night before.

And, indeed, everyone did sleep well, except, once again, Robert. Whatever the reason, he was very wide awake; and at some hour in the middle of the night he crept out of his sack and walked into the open, away from the trees, intent upon comparing the magnetic north — which his compass gave him — with the true north, which anyone can find by looking at the Great Bear sprawling across the skies and getting the Pole Star from its pointers.

Having marked the difference on the glass of his compass with a spot of ink

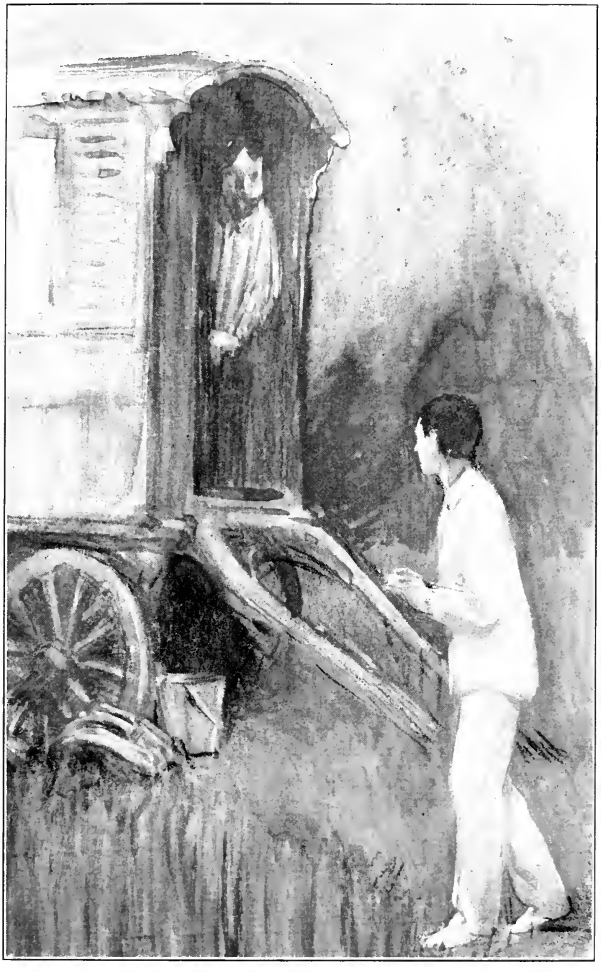
from his fountain-pen, Robert returned to the Hollow; but to his astonishment and alarm, on reaching the caravan he could not find the tent. There was the Slowcoach right enough, with its white blinds glimmering, and he could hear Moses munching close by; but there was no tent, and apparently no Diogenes.

Robert was not a timid boy, but the lateness of the hour and the loneliness of the place and this extraordinary occurrence affected his nerves, so that he suddenly had a panic, and, running up the steps, he beat on the caravan-door as if wolves were after him.

"Hullo! hullo!" cried a gruff voice that certainly did not belong to any of the girls. "What the dickens do you want?"

Robert nearly fell off the steps in his surprise. "Please," he said, "I want the Slowcoach."

For answer the door opened, and a big



What the Dickens do you Want?

head and beard and a pyjama arm were pushed out.

"Slowcoach?" the head said. "What Slowcoach? There's no Slowcoach here."

"The Slowcoach is the name of our caravan," said Robert.

"Oh, it is?" said the head. "Then it's over there. I saw it as I came in. This is the Snail."

"Thank you very much," said Robert, who had quite recovered his composure. "How late are you going to stay here in the morning?"

"I don't know," said the head, yawning vastly. "It depends on the country. I shan't go till after breakfast, anyhow. But I'm much too tired to talk now. Good-night, Slowcoach."

"Good-night, Snail," said Robert.

And that is how the Avories came to know the great Hamish MacAngus; for when Robert led them round to visit him the next morning ("And it is right for

us to call first," said Janet, "since we have lived here longer"), they found that the owner of the Snail was nothing less than the famous —— But I must tell you in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XI

THE WAYSIDE FRIEND

Mr. MacAngus had just finished his ham and eggs, and was lighting his pipe.

"Good morning, Slowcoaches," he said. "I'm very pleased to see you. Sit down wherever you like. Furniture by Dame Nature; everything as nice as Mother makes it. This is a friendly, reasonable hour to meet. That young brother of yours — I suppose he is your brother" — pointing to Robert — "pays calls in the middle of the night. He seems to think that every caravan in the world belongs to him. How a man who lives in a London terrace knows his house I never could understand, but to recognize one's own caravan ought to be quite easy."

Mr. MacAngus, you must understand,

did not say all this in one breath, for he was a slow man. But it reads as if he

Mr. MacAngus had just finished his ham and eggs, and was lighting his pipe.

did, because none of the others uttered a word. It was all too bewildering and

also too amusing. He was so big and so strange, and he had such a twinkle in his eye, that they preferred to let him go on, knowing that whatever he said would be entertaining.

"Well," he said at last, "now we must stop talking nonsense and introduce ourselves. But first I should like you all to guess who I am and what I do for a living. You first," he said, pointing to Janet.

"I think you are a kind of hermit," she said at last.

"Right," he said. "But that's not enough. What do I do? You," he added, pointing to Mary, "what do you think I do?"

"Perhaps you lecture," said Mary, "or preach. No, I don't think you preach. I think very likely you speak to villagers about politics — tariff reform and things like that."

The big man laughed. "Very well," he said. "Now you," to Robert.

"I think you're a gentleman gipsy," said Robert. "Like Lavengro. Are you?"

"In a way," said the stranger, "but I shan't tell you till you've all guessed."

Jack Rotheram then guessed that he was a spy, and this amused him immensely.

"In a kind of way I am that too," he answered. "At any rate, I am always looking out for the fatness of the land."

Hester guessed he had a broken heart because of a disappointment in love, and was living all alone because he hated the world, like Lord Byron.

He liked this most of all, and laughed for a long time — much longer, he explained afterwards, than a broken-hearted Lord Byron would have done.

Horace Campbell did not exactly guess, but said that he hoped that the stranger was a gentleman burglar — a kind of Raffles and Robin Hood in one — who robbed only the wicked rich and helped the poor. "As," he added, "I want to."

"Oh, do you?" said the big man. "Well, don't rob me, anyway. Wait till I have led the Snail to a place of safety."

And lastly Gregory guessed. "I think," he said, "you are a vagabond."

"Gregory!" cried Janet; "you mustn't say things like that," while the stranger laughed again.

"Why not?" Gregory inquired. "I mean like the Wandering Jew Mr. Crawley told us about. He called him the prince of vagabonds."

"Well," said the stranger, "Gregory's right. I am a vagabond. But I'm something else too, and I'll tell you. I'm an artist. My name is Hamish MacAngus. I live in the Snail most of the summer, and in London in the winter. I cover pieces of cardboard and canvas with paint more or less like trees, and cows, and sheep, and skies, and people who have more pennies than brains buy them from me; and then I take the pennies, and change them for

the nice sensible things of life, such as bacon, and tobacco, and oats. My horse's name is Pencil. I came here from Banbury, and I am making slowly for Cropthorne. Now tell me all about yourselves. Tell me in the order of age."

The children looked at each other, and laughed.

"You first," said Mr. MacAngus, again to Janet; "you're the eldest, I can see."

"My name," said Janet, "is Janet Avory. I live in Chiswick. Our caravan is the Slowcoach. We are going to Stratford-on-Avon. Our horse is called Moses. Our —— "

"Oh, Janet," said Hester, "you're not leaving anything for us to tell!"

"Very well," said Janet, "that's all."

"My name," said Mary, "is Mary Rotheram. I am the daughter of a doctor at Chiswick. My brother and I are the Avories' guests. I am fourteen. Father has one of your pictures."

"Good judge!" Mr. MacAngus said.

"Now, Macbeth," he said, pointing to Robert.

"My name isn't Macbeth," said Robert.

"No," said the artist, "but that's how I think of you. Why? Can anyone tell me?"

"I can," said Hester. "Because he woke you up — 'Macbeth hath murdered sleep.'"

"Splendid!" said Mr. MacAngus. "As a reward you shall tell your story before Macbeth does."

"I am nine," said Hester. "My name is Hester. I adore Shakespeare. I am Janet's sister."

"Good!" said Mr. MacAngus. "We will read Shakespeare together this afternoon. From the way you walk I can see that this is blister day. We will all take it easy and be happy, and you shall cure your lameness. Now, Mac."

"I am thirteen," said Robert. "I am the geographer of the party. I am sorry

for murdering your sleep, but glad, too, because you're so jolly."

"Now you," said Mr. MacAngus to Jack Rotheram.

"I am not an Avory," said Jack. "I am Mary's brother. I am twelve. I am going to Osborne next year."

"Very sensible of you," said Mr. MacAngus. "And you, sir," he added to Horace Campbell, "the burglar's friend."

"My name is Horace Campbell," he replied. "I am the son of the Vicar of Chiswick. I am nine. I am also the Keeper of the Tin-opener."

"Oh, yes," said Jack, "I forgot that. I am the Preserver of Enough Oil in the Beatrice Stove."

"I am proud to meet such important personages," said Mr. MacAngus. "And now, lastly, you," — he said to Gregory, — "the little nipper, the tiny tot of the party."

Gregory was furious. He scowled at the artist like thunder.

"Go on," said Mr. MacAngus; "don't mind me. I always tease little important boys."

"My name is Gregory Bruce Avory," said Gregory, "and I am seven. I am going to be an aviator. I have to ask the farmers if we may camp in their fields, and I keep the corkscrew. Please tell me," he added, "why you call your horse Pencil?"

"Because he draws me," said Mr. MacAngus.

"And now," he continued, "let us do the most interesting thing in the world to people like ourselves: let us examine each other's caravans."

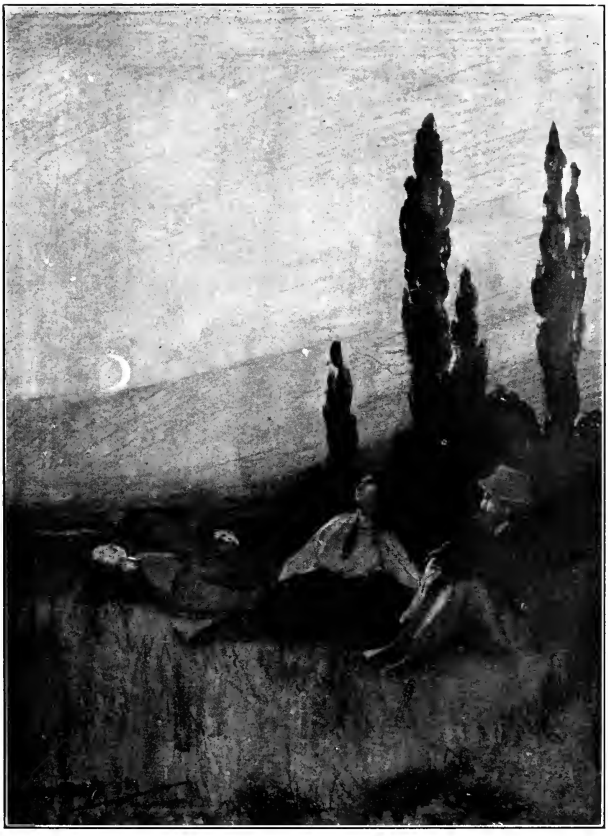
After they had finished visiting each other, and Mr. MacAngus had given them, speaking as an old campaigner, some very useful if simple hints, such as always pitching the tent with its back to the wind; and keeping inside a supply of dry wood to light the fires with; and tying fern on

Moses's head, against the flies; and carrying cabbage-leaves in their own hats, against the heat; and walking with long staves instead of short walking-sticks — after this he made them all sit round their fire, and sketched them, and the picture hangs at this very moment in Mrs. Avory's bedroom at "The Gables."

After lunch, which he shared with them, adding to the pot some very fragrant mixed herbs from a little packet, they lay on the grass round him, and he read to them from Shakespeare — first from "Macbeth," which was very dreadful, but fine, and then from "Midsummer Night's Dream" and the "Winter's Tale."

After supper he took them outside the Hollow, and they lay on their backs and studied the stars, about which he knew everything that can be known, and nothing whatever that Gregory wanted to know.

And they went to bed early, to be ready



They lay on their Backs and studied the Stars.

for the long journey on the morrow — with their feet covered with Mr. Lenox's ointment — declaring it was one of the most delightful days they had ever spent.

CHAPTER XII

STRATFORD-ON-AVON

The next morning was dull, but dry, and they were ready early, for there were sixteen miles to be done before Stratford-on-Avon was reached. They were, however, easy miles, twelve of them being on the flat beside the Stour.

Mr. MacAngus had decided to stay on in those parts a little longer before making for Cropthorne, and therefore, after helping with the inspanning, as he called packing up, he said good-bye, but gave them a list of the places where it was worth while asking for him. They were sorry to lose him, but the immediate future was too exciting, with Stratford-on-Avon and Mrs. Avory in it, to allow time for regrets.

After a day entirely without any adventures they found Mrs. Avory. She was

waiting for them at the Shakespeare Hotel, which is one of the most fascinating inns in England, with staircases and passages in lavish profusion, and bedrooms named after the plays. Hester and her mother slept in the "Winter's Tale," Janet and Mary in "Cymbeline." Robert and Gregory were "The Two Gentlemen of Verona" for the time being, and Horace and Jack lay in the "Comedy of Errors." Kink and Diogenes were somewhere at the back, and the Slowcoach was in the yard, surrounded by motor-cars.

At the next table at dinner — in a beautiful old room with green matting on the floor and a huge open fireplace — sat an old gentleman with white hair and bright eyes behind very luminous spectacles, and from the tone in which he talked to the waiter they guessed him to be an American. After dinner he smoked cigarettes in an immensely long holder of amber and gold, and now and then smiled at the children.

They were all rather tired, and went quickly to bed. Robert, who, you remember, had been so contemptuous of the Shakespeare Hotel blankets and sheets, slept a full ten hours; never, indeed, can a Gentleman of Verona have passed a better night; and the others expressed no grief at having to lie in proper beds once more.

Nicholas Imber

When they came down to breakfast the next morning, they found a letter addressed to —

Mr. Kink's Children's Party,
Shakespeare Hotel,
Stratford-on-Avon.

Robert looked at it, and threw it down.

"Very offensive," he said.

Mrs. Avory handed it to Janet.

"Whoever can it be from?" Janet asked, turning it over and over. "The postmark is Chiswick."

"A good way to find out," said Gregory, "is to open it."

Janet did so, and read it, laughing. "It's an attempt at a nasty letter from William," she said. "He's pretending to be cross because Jack won. Poor William! Listen:

"Dear Little Ones,

"I hope you are having a good time in that stuffy caravan, and manage to avoid blisters. I thought you would like to hear that father has given me leave to go to Sheppey, and stay for three days with Mr. Fowler, who has promised to take me up in an aëroplane. I am also to have riding-lessons, and Aunt Mildred has promised me a pony, being so sorry to hear that I was done out of the cara-

van trip by a fluke. Uncle Jim has sent me £5. According to the papers the weather is going to break up directly. Your affectionate and prosperous friend,

"WILLIAM ROTHERAM."

Jack was speechless with fury. "The story-teller!" he cried.

But Mary laughed. "I think it's rather clever," she said. "It almost took me in."

"Do you mean to say it's a good joke?" Jack asked.

"I think so," said Mary.

"I don't," said Jack. "I think jokes ought to be straightforward. I think you ought to know exactly that they are jokes."

"Miss Bingham," said Robert, "would say that such inventions were in poor taste."

"So they are," said Jack.

"Poor William!" said Mrs. Avory. "You oughtn't to be cross with him, Jack. After all, he did lose when you tossed up."

"Yes," said Jack. "But, look here, Mrs. Avory, suppose some of it's true."

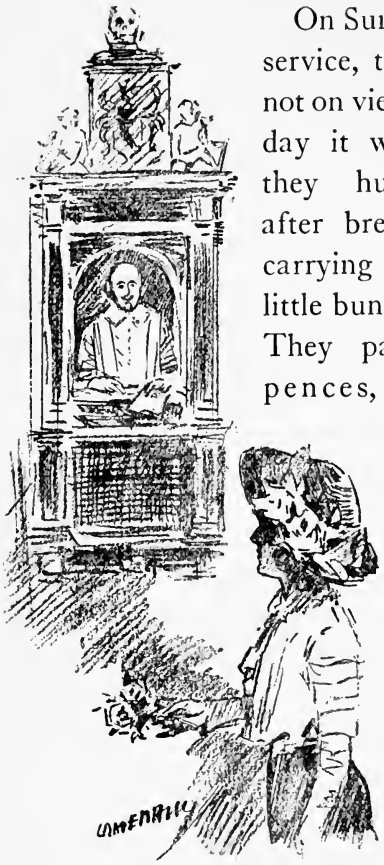
At this they all roared, for it showed what Jack's trouble really was.

"Oh, Jack," said his sister, "you mustn't want everything. Even if it were true, you ought to be much happier here."

"Have some more coffee, Jack," Mrs. Avory said quickly.

As it was Sunday, they went to Trinity Church (which usually costs sixpence to enter, because of Shakespeare's tomb — a charge of which I am sure the poet would not approve). As the words in the sermon grew longer and longer, Hester made renewed efforts to get a glimpse of the tomb, but it was in a part of the chancel that was not within sight. She had instead to study the windows, which she always liked to do in church; and she found herself repeating the lines on the tomb, which she had long known:

> "Good friend, for Jesus sake forbeare
> To digg the dust enclosed heare:
> Bleste be y^{e} man y$_{t}$ spares these stones,
> And curst be he y^{t} moves my bones."



The Shakespeare Monument.

On Sunday, even after service, the church was not on view, but the next day it was there that they hurried directly after breakfast, Hester carrying with her some little bunches of flowers. They paid their sixpences, and made straight for Shakespeare's tomb, and stood before the coloured bust — that bust which you see in reproduction at every turn in this loyal town. It is perhaps more interesting than impressive,

and the children had a serious argument over it, Jack even daring to say that the face was stupid-looking, and Gregory declining almost petulantly to consider Shakespeare in the least like a swan.

Poor Hester, how to defend him against these horrid boys!

Janet came to the rescue by saying that Jack was probably thinking that the forehead was too high; but a high forehead was a sign of genius.

"It may be so," said Jack, "but father has a poor patient with water on the brain just like that." (What can you do with people who talk in this way?)

"But, of course," said Horace, "it doesn't matter what he looked like really, because he didn't write the plays at all. They were written by Roger Bacon."

This led to acute trouble.

"How can you say such wicked things!" Hester protested, bursting into tears.

"But I read it in a book," said Horace,

who had not wished to hurt her, but still desired to serve the truth. "It was sent to father."

"Everything in books isn't true," said Janet.

"Oh, I say!" said Horace.

"Of course it's not," said Mary. "Books are always being replied to and squashed."

"Well, this book was by a Member of Parliament," said Horace.

This was very awkward for the defenders of Shakespeare. What were they to do?

Gregory, who had not seemed to be interested in the debate, settled it. He walked up to an old man who was standing near them, and asked him. "It isn't true," he said, "is it, that Shakespeare's works were written by Bacon?"

"No," said the old man, "it's a wicked falsehood."

"How do you know?" asked Horace.

"How do I know!" exclaimed the old man. "Why, I've lived at Stratford, man

and boy, seventy years, and of course I know."

"Of course," said Janet.

"But a Member of Parliament says it was Bacon," Horace persisted.

"What's he Member for?" the old man asked. "Eh? Not for Stratford-on-Avon, I'll be bound."

"I don't know," said Horace, who had nothing else to say.

"Take my advice," the old man replied, "and don't believe anyone who says that Shakespeare wanted help. Look at that brow!"

"But he isn't like a swan, is he?" Gregory asked.

"Of course not," said the old man. "That's poetry. If he had been like a swan, it wouldn't have been poetry to call him one."

Gregory pondered for a little while. Then he asked: "Would it be poetry to call a swan a Shakespeare?"

"Oh, Gregory, come away," said Janet; "you're too clever this morning!"

Hester, however, still had much to do, and she refused to go until she had laid some flowers also on Anne Hathaway's tomb and on that of Susanna, Shakespeare's daughter, who married Dr. Hall. She also copied the epitaph, which begins:

> "Witty above her sexe, but that's not all,
> Wise to Salvation was good Mistress Hall."

But I am going too fast, for this was Monday morning, and we have not yet accounted for all of Sunday. The only Shakespeare relic which they visited that day was the site of his house, New Place, close to the hotel. The house, of course, should be standing now, and would be, but for the behaviour of a deplorable clergyman, as you shall hear. Shakespeare, grown rich, and thinking of returning to Stratford from London, bought New Place for his home; he died there in 1616, and his wife

and daughter, or his descendants, lived in it for many years after. And then it was bought by the Rev. Francis Gastrell, a Cheshire vicar, who began by cutting down Shakespeare's mulberry tree — under which not only the poet had sat, but also Garrick — because he was annoyed that visitors wished to see it; and then, a little later, in his rage at the demand for the poor rate (a tax to help support the workhouse, which, since he was living elsewhere, he considered he ought not to have to pay), he pulled down the building too. That was in 1759, and now the site of the house is a public garden where you may walk and still see of this memorable habitation only the traces of some of the walls and Shakespeare's well.

They found the old gentleman from the hotel in the garden reading his guidebook, and it was he who told them the story. "So far as I can understand," said he, "nothing was done to the man at all. Nobody

horsewhipped him. It was lucky it did not happen in America."

The old gentleman, whose name was Nicholas Imber, and who came from Philadelphia, then took them to see Harvard house, of which he, as an American, was very proud, and they drifted about with him, and looked at other of the old Stratford buildings.

All the time he kept on saying quietly to himself: "Vengeance on the Rev. Francis Gastrell!"

"Perhaps," said Hester, "there is a mistake in the verses in the church. Perhaps they ought to be:

> "'Bleste be ye man y^{t} spares these bones,
> And curst be he y^{t} moves my stones.'

That would mean the Rev. Francis Gastrell."

"I hope so," said Mr. Imber. "It's a very good idea. But why do you like Shakespeare so?"

"He's so wonderful," said Hester.

"Yes, but so is Scott, say, and Dickens."

"Oh, but Shakespeare's so beautiful, too," said Hester.

The children had gone alone to the church on the Monday morning. On returning to the hotel they found Mrs. Avory ready for them, and all started for the birthplace in Henley Street, where Shakespeare was born, probably on April 23, 1564. This is now a museum with all kinds of Shakespeare relics in it, profoundly interesting to Hester if not to the others. The desk at which he sat in the Grammar School is there; and his big chair from the Falcon Inn at Bidford; and many portraits; and on one of the windows, scratched with a diamond, is the name of Sir Walter Scott. The boys wanted to write their names, too, but it is no longer allowed; although I fancy that if Sir Walter Scott could visit Stratford again he would be permitted to break the rule.

They stood in the bedroom where Shakespeare was born, and where his father and mother probably died; and they looked into the garden where he used to play; and Horace very mischievously pointed out the fireplace in the kitchen where, as he told Hester, they cooked their bacon.

Mrs. Avory was then informed of the mean attacks on Shakespeare which Horace had made in the church, and their complete refutation by the old man, whose judgment she upheld.

"Horace," she said, "oughtn't to be here at all. He ought to be at St. Albans. We will look up the trains when we get back to the hotel."

Horace was not quite certain whether this was serious or not. "Why St. Albans?" he asked.

"Because that is where your friend Bacon lived," said Mrs. Avory.

The next place to visit was the Memorial, which is a very ugly building by the

river, where the Festival is held every spring. This is not very interesting to children, being given up to books and pictures connected with the stage; but close by are the steps leading to the boats, each of which has a Shakespearian name, and Mrs. Avory allowed them to row about for an hour before lunch. This they did, Robert and Mary and Horace and Hester in the *Hermione*, and Janet and Gregory and Jack in the *Rosalind*.

After lunch, while they were waiting about in the hall looking at the pictures, and not quite sure what to do, Mr. Imber of Philadelphia approached them. "I wonder," he said, "if you would do me a favour. I have scores of nephews and nieces, and also many friends, in America, to whom I want to send picture postcards. Now," he continued, "listen here. Here's seven shillings, one for each of you; and here's a five-shilling piece. Now I am going to give you each a shilling to buy picture post-

cards with, and I want you each to buy them separately — in different shops if you like — and then bring them back to me, and I'll give the five-shilling piece to the one who has what I think the best collection. Now off you go."

So they hurried off. Stratford-on-Avon, I may tell you, exists almost entirely on the sale of picture postcards and Shakespeare relics, and there was therefore no difficulty in finding seven shops, each with a first-class assortment.

In this way an hour went very pleasantly, and then the results were laid before the old gentleman. Of course, there were many duplicates, but each collection had four or five cards that the others had not. After long consideration, Mr. Imber handed the five shillings to Mary.

Gregory's was the only really original collection, for, taking advantage of the circumstance that Mr. Imber had said nothing about the postcards being strictly

of Stratford-on-Avon, he had bought only what pleased himself: all being what are called comic cards — dreadful pictures of mothers-in-law, and twins, and surprised lovers.

Mr. Imber laughed, and told him to keep them.

"Now," said Gregory, selecting a peculiarly vulgar picture of a bull tossing a red-nosed man into a cucumber frame, "I shall send this to Miss Bingham."

"Gregory!" exclaimed Janet; "you shall do nothing of the kind."

"Why not?" Gregory asked. "She'll only laugh, and say: 'How coarse!'"

"No," said Janet, "we'll take them back to the shop, and change them for nice ones."

"Oh, no, not all," Gregory pleaded. "Collins would love this one of the policeman with a cold pie being put into his hand by the cook behind his back."

"Very well," said Janet, "you may

send her that, especially as we're getting her some pretty ones."

"Yes," said Gregory, "and Eliza must have this one of the soldier pushing the twins in the perambulator."

"Very well," said Janet, "but no others."

"Oh, yes," said Gregory, "there's Runcie. I'm sure she'd love this one of the curate being pulled both ways at once by two fat women. She's so religious."

After tea they walked to Shottery to see Anne Hathaway's cottage, although not even Hester could be very keen about the poet's wife. Hester, indeed, had it firmly in her head that she was not kind to him. "Otherwise," she said, "he would have left her his best bed instead of his second-best bed."

None the less Hester was very glad to have Mr. Imber's present of little china models of the cottage and the birthplace. To the others he gave either these or coloured busts of Shakespeare; and to

Gregory an ivory pencil-case containing a tiny piece of glass into which you peeped and saw twelve views of Stratford-on-Avon.

After dinner they sat down to the serious task of writing on the picture post-cards which they had bought for themselves, while Gregory earned sixpence by sticking stamps on Mr. Imber's vast supply. Jack felt it his duty also to write to William:

"DEAR WILLIAM,

"Thanks for your very kind and informing letter. We are glad you are having such a good time. This is a rotten caravan, and you are well out of it.

"Yours,

"J. R.

"P.S. — Don't fall off your clothes-horse too often."

CHAPTER XIII

THE ADVENTURE OF THE YOUNG POLICEMAN

Mrs. Avory's train to London was an early one, and the Slowcoaches had left Stratford behind them before ten, and were by eleven at Binton Bridges, where the river again joins the road, and where they stopped to discuss the question whether to go straight on through Bidford and the Salfords, or to take the road to the south of the Avon through Welsford and the Littletons.

Robert was very firm for the Bidford way, and, of course, he won; and, as it happened, it was very well that he did.

It was a fine, bracing day, and they

were all very vigorous after the two days of rest in Stratford, and they therefore trudged gaily along in the sun, not stopping again until just before Bidford, on the hill where Shakespeare's crab-tree used to grow, under which he had slept so long after one of his drinking contests. For it seems to have been his habit to go now and then with other Stratford friends to neighbouring villages to see whether they or the villagers could drink the most — a custom that even Hester found it hard to defend. Indeed, she got no farther than to say: "I am sure he was naturally troubled by thirst."

The tree has gone, but another stands in its place, and by this the children sat and ate a little lunch, and talked about the poet. Robert repeated to them the old rhyme about the Warwickshire villages which Shakespeare is said to have composed — possibly in this very field:

"Piping Pebworth, dancing Marston,
Haunted Hillborough, hungry Grafton,
Dodging Exhall, Papist Wixford,
Beggarly Broom and drunken Bidford."

Bidford is not drunken now; it is only sleepy: a long steep street, with, at the top, the church and a beautiful old house, now cottages, once the Falcon Inn, where Shakespeare used to drink, and where the chair came from that they had seen at the birthplace yesterday; and at the foot the Swan Inn and the old bridge.

Bidford is built very like a watering-place — that is to say, it is all on one side of the river. The water to-day looked very tempting, especially as a great number of boats were lying on it waiting to be hired; but Robert sternly ordered his party onwards.

Has it ever occurred to you that in the life of every policeman there is one day when he wears his majestic uniform in public for the first time? It must, of

course, be so. No matter how many times he may have put it on at home privately, to get used to it, the day must at last come when he has to walk forth into the streets, and in the eyes of those who have known him ever since he was a boy, or even a baby, changed from a man like themselves to an important and rather dreadful guardian of the peace. If he is a simple fellow, the great day may leave him very much as he was; but if he is at all given to conceit, it may make him worse.

Benjamin Roper was beginning his duties as a member of the Warwickshire constabulary.

Now it happened that this Tuesday on which the Slowcoaches were on their way from Stratford to Evesham

was the very day on which Benjamin Roper was beginning his duties as a member of the Warwickshire constabulary. His beat in the morning lay between Bidford and Salford Priors, and he was standing beside the road, on the top of the little hill called Marriage Hill — just before you cross the River Arrow and come to Salford Priors station — at the very moment that Moses, after painfully dragging the Slowcoach up the same eminence, had reached the summit.

At the door of the caravan were to be seen Mary, Hester, and Gregory, whose turn it was to ride; and P.C. Roper stared in astonishment at faces so unlike the swarthy, tangled children he was expecting.

He stared so long indeed — everything being a little strange to him that day — that Jack, who, with Horace, was walking just behind, politely but with every intention of being severe, inquired: "Do you think you'll know us next time?"

P.C. Roper said nothing, but frowned

at Jack with an expression so full of dignity, reprimand, and suspicion that Jack could not help laughing.

"Oh, I say," he said, "don't be cross. Mayn't we go about in a caravan if we want to? No one else has objected."

"No," Horace added, "the King said nothing as we came through London, and the Mayor of Stratford asked us to tea."

Kink laughed at this — much too loudly — and the young policeman realized that he had been foolish. Instead, however, of laughing, too, he became more important and angry, and suddenly he thought of a means of retaliation.

Pulling out a notebook and pencil, he said: "I want to see your license for this caravan." He said this not because he really wanted to see it, but because it suggested itself as a good demand and one which would make the children realize that he was a man of authority not to be trifled with. But when he saw the blank

which fell on their faces, and even on Kink's too, he knew that he had stumbled by chance on an excellent weapon, and he resolved to make the most of it.

"Come," he said, "the license. I'm waiting to see it."

Janet and Robert, who had by this time come up, were told of the difficulty.

"License?" said Robert. "What license?"

"All carriages must have licenses," said the policeman, "and all caravans have to produce theirs when called for, because they're always moving about."

The children gathered round Kink to discuss it. Kink said that it was all Greek to him. He supposed, of course, that caravans had to have licenses, but he'd never heard of demands for them in the highroad. "But do be civil to him, Master Robert," he implored. "You never get any good out of cheeking the police."

"Well," said Robert to the constable,

"this caravan was given to us. The license for it was got, I feel sure, by the person who gave it to us."

"Who was that person?" P.C. Roper asked, with his pencil ready to write down the name.

Here was a poser. Who indeed? The children had discussed X. often enough, but were no nearer to discovering him.

"I don't know," Robert was forced to say.

P.C. Roper smiled a deadly smile. "Oho!" he said. "You don't know who gave you the caravan! Things are looking up. Caravans drop from the sky, do they? A very thin story indeed. I'll trouble you to come with me, all of you, and see my inspector."

P.C. Roper was quite happy now. He had not only filled the impertinent children with fear, but he had done a smart thing on his very first day as constable. He drew himself up, and returned the notebook to his pocket.

"Your inspector?" Robert said. "Where does he live?"

"Well," said P.C. Roper, "he lives at Bidford, but he's at Stratford to-day, at the Police Court, and he won't be back till the evening."

"We can't wait till evening," Robert said. "It would throw out all our plans."

"Plans!" exclaimed P.C. Roper. "Plans indeed! Aren't you suspicious-looking persons in the possession of an unlicensed caravan, and unable to give any reasonable account of how you got it? Your plans can wait."

"Please give us a little time to discuss it," Janet said, and they all surrounded Kink once more.

"Of course it's absurd," Jack said; "but what an awful pity you don't know who X. is! That's what makes the trouble. It looks so silly, too."

"Do you really think that caravans have to show licenses?" Janet asked Kink.

"I never thought about it," Kink said, "but it sounds reasonable in a way. Gipsies, you know. If Master Campbell hadn't said that about the King and the Mayor I shouldn't have laughed, and then the copper wouldn't have lost his wool, and we should be all right."

"Never mind about that," said Janet. "We can't bother about what is done. The thing is, what we are to do. How funny of Mr. Lenox not to have thought about the license! — he thought of everything else."

"Yes, and X. too," said Robert. "But it's just terrible to have to go back and wait all day for the inspector. We are due at Evesham this afternoon."

"Couldn't we overpower him," Horace said, "and bind him, and leave him in the ditch?"

"Yes," said Hester, "or ask him to have a glass of milk, and drug it?"

"Don't be absurd," said Robert. "This

is serious. All right," he called out to P.C. Roper, who was getting anxious, "we're just coming."

Then Janet had a happy thought. "I say," she exclaimed, "where is that envelope that Uncle Christopher gave us? He said we were to open it if we got into a real mess. Well, now's the time."

"It's in the safe," said Robert, and he dashed into the caravan and brought it out.

Janet opened it and read it slowly. Then she smiled a radiant smile, and, advancing to the constable, handed him a paper.

"Here is the license," she said; "you will find our name and address on it. Now, perhaps, we may go on."

P.C. Roper read the license very carefully, frowned, and handed it back.

"It would save a lot of trouble," he said, "if you would produce such things directly you were asked for them."

"But we didn't know we'd got it," Janet said.

P.C. Roper pressed his hand to his forehead. "I don't know where I am," he muttered.

"They've got a caravan, and they don't know who gave it to them; and they've got envelopes, and they don't know what's in them. Does your mother know you're out?" he added as a farewell shot.

The Slowcoaches could not help it; they gave him three cheers, and then three more for Uncle Christopher.

"Well," said Janet, "that's all right, but it's lucky he did not see Uncle Christopher's letter. Listen:

"DEAR CHILDREN,

"It has suddenly occurred to me that some ass of a policeman may want to see your license, and I have therefore procured one for you. If you get into any kind of trouble, be sure to give my name and address, and telegraph for me.

"Your affectionate Uncle,

"CHRIS."

"It would have been better," Kink said, "if your uncle had handed you the license right away — not made a mystery of it."

"Oh, no," said Hester.

As it happened, they were destined not to reach Evesham that day, for at Abbots Salford Moses cast a shoe, and that meant the blacksmith and delay. When the accident was discovered, and the children were surrounding Moses and helping Kink in his examination of the hoof, a farmer who was walking by stopped and joined them. He asked the trouble, and offered them his advice.

"You put your caravan in my yard there," he said, pointing to a beautiful gateway just ahead, "and you make yourselves comfortable there while the horse is being shod. I'll show you the house if you like," he added; "it's very old, and haunted too, and there's a grand boating-place at the weir just across the meadows. Don't worry about the horse or anything.

The Children at the Farm-house.

If you go to bed early and get up early, it will come to the same thing as if you had gone right on."

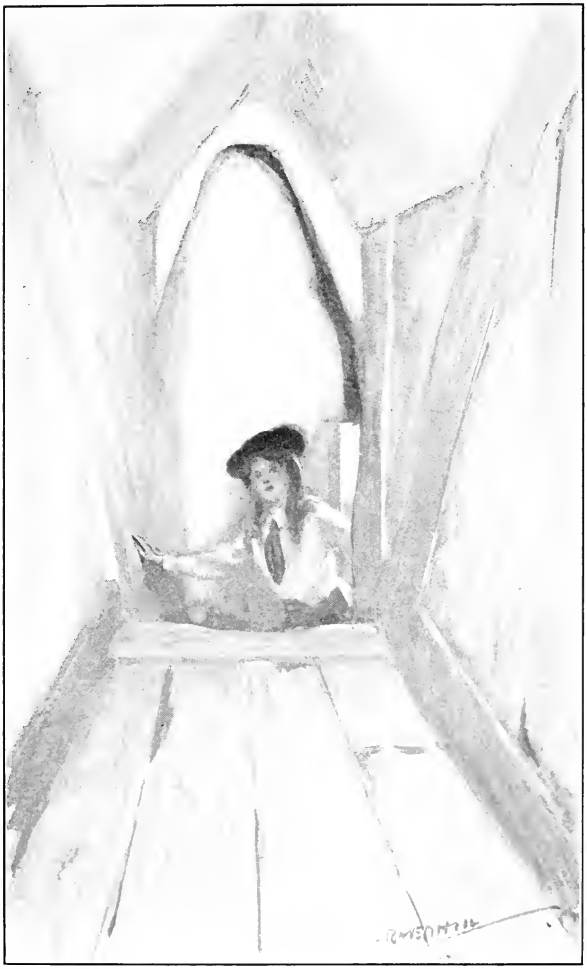
Everyone except Robert, who liked to see his time-tables obeyed, and perhaps Gregory, who had been deprived for some days of his office of asking leave for a camping-ground, and was now balked again, was glad of the mischance that brought camp so early, and Hester was wild with pleasure, for Salford Hall is an old mansion of grey stone, built three hundred years ago, and now mysterious and, except for a few rooms, desolate. It has also an old garden and a fish-pond, and a little Roman Catholic chapel whose altar-candles have been alight for centuries.

The farmer was very kind. He gave the children leave to go anywhere and everywhere, but they must not, he said, run or jump, because the floors were not strong enough. He led them from room to room, to the dancing-gallery in the roof.

There was a very old bagatelle-table in one room, all moth-eaten, and a few old pictures still on the walls — a knight and his lady with Elizabethan ruffs, and a portrait of a greyhound. From a top window the farmer showed them Evesham's bell-tower.

But the most exciting moment was when each of them in turn was allowed to hide in the priest's hiding-hole. This was a very ingenious cupboard behind a row of shelves intended to have books or china on them, which swung back when you loosened a catch. Hester crouched here and shut her eyes, and firmly believed that the Protestants were after her.

In her next letter she implored her mother to take the Hall, and live there in the summer. "I am sure," she wrote, "it would be very cheap, because it is so shabby and is crumbling away in many places. I would gladly live in the priest's hiding-hole always. Please think about it seriously."



Each of them was allowed to hide in the Priest's Hiding-hole.

Afterwards the farmer showed them the way down to the weir, over the railway, and advised them to have the caravan taken down there, and sleep there that night near the rushing water.

"You couldn't have done it two months ago," he said.

"Why not?" Robert asked.

"Guess why," said the farmer.

And will you believe it, none of them could guess.

"Because it was flooded," said the farmer. "In winter it's often just a great lake, from the railway at the foot of our garden right to the Marlcliff Hills."

And so Moses (with a beautiful new shoe) was put into the shafts again, and they went gently over the soft green meadows to the weir, and there they had their supper, and explored the mill and the shaggy wood overhanging it, and rowed a little in a very safe boat, and stood on the little bridges, and watched the rushing water, and then

walked slowly beside the still stream higher up as the light began to fade, and surprised the water-rats feeding or gossiping on the banks — none of which things could they have done had Moses had the poor sense to retain his near fore-shoe.

CHAPTER XIV

THE ADVENTURE OF THE LITTLE OLD LADY

They left the weir very early the next morning, after a breakfast from the cold ham which Mrs. Avory had bought them at Stratford. On their way through the village they stopped at Salford Hall, because Hester and Gregory had had an argument as to whether or not it was possible to hear the breathing of the person in the hiding-hole. The farmer allowed them to go upstairs and try, and, as it happened, Hester was right, and you could hear it, if you had patience. Gregory came out again as purple as a plum through holding it in so long.

Then they said good-bye to the farmer and strode on through Harrington and

Norton, and a little beyond this Robert took those that cared about it to see the obelisk on the site of the Battle of Evesham, at which Simon de Montfort was killed in 1265. And so they came through the orchards of plum-trees, on which the fruit was now forming, to Evesham itself.

It was while they were walking through Evesham, beside or behind the Slowcoach, in the middle of the road, that Janet felt a hand on her arm, and, looking round, perceived a very small and very neat and very anxious little servant maid.

"Please," she said, "Miss Redstone, my mistress says, will you all step into her house and partake of refreshment, and do her a very great favour?"

Janet could hardly believe her ears.

"All of us!" she exclaimed.

"Yes," said the little servant, "all, please."

Janet thought very hard for a moment or two. Who was this Miss Redstone?

What would Mrs. Avory do under the same circumstances? she was asking herself. "Which house?" she inquired at last.

"That one," said the little anxious servant, pointing to the neatest and brightest little house you ever saw, with dazzling steps and a shining knocker, and a poor little pathetic face peering hopefully over the blind.

The pathetic little face settled it. "All right," Janet said at once, and, calling the others together and telling Kink to wait for them outside the town, she led them in.

They were shown into a tiny and spotless parlour, with woolwork footstools, where after a moment or so they were joined by Miss Redstone, the little old lady whom Janet had seen at the window, but whose face was now smiling and contented.

"You must think me very strange, my dears," she said, "but I will explain. I am Godfrey Fairfax."

A dreadful silence fell on the room. The children looked at each other shamefacedly, and almost in fear, for they thought the little old lady must be mad.

As for her, she again looked the picture of woe. "O dear," she said, "is it possible that none of you have ever even heard of me! Surely *one* of my stories must have found its way to your house?"

"Do you write stories?" Janet asked.

"Yes, I have written lots, but I'm afraid they don't sell as they ought to. Of course, Godfrey Fairfax is not my real name; it is just the name I take as a writer, because people prefer that books should be written by a man rather than by a woman. I am really Miss Redstone. Why I called you in was to ask if you would be so very kind as to sit down and have some cake and milk while I read you my last story — quite a short one — and you can tell me what you think of it. There are so few children that I know here, and it makes

such a difference to get some real criticism. Do you mind?"

They all said they didn't mind at all, and after the cake and milk had been brought in by the little servant, Godfrey Fairfax cleared her throat and began.

"It is a story," she said, "of Roundheads and Cavaliers — a very suitable story to write here, so close to the battlefields of Tewkesbury and Marston Moor. It is called 'Barbara's Fugitive.' Now listen, my dears."

Barbara's Fugitive

On a bright June morning, early in the Protectorate, Colonel Myddelton, followed by a groom, rode through the gates of the old Hall and turned his horse's head towards London. At the bend in the road, halfway up Sheringham Hill, he stopped a moment and waved his hand in the direction of the house. A white handkerchief fluttered at an upper window in reply.

"My poor lonely Barbara!" said the Colonel, smiling tenderly as he passed again out of sight of his daughter.

"Dear father!" said Barbara, as the Colonel disappeared from view. She did not, however, at once leave the window, but remained leaning out, with the warm touch of the sun on her head, drinking in the morning sounds.

The village, half a mile distant, was just visible to Barbara through the trees — red-roofed, compact, the cottages gathering about the church like chickens round the mother hen. On a summer day like this anyone listening at the Hall could hear the busy noises, the hum of this little hive of humanity, with perfect clearness; the beat of the hammer on the anvil in Matthew Hale's smithy, the "Gee, whoa!" of the carter on the distant road, the scrunching of the wagon-wheels, the crowing cocks, and now and then the shouts of boys and the laughter of children. These audible

God send the Crumb well down.

tokens of active life were a comfort to Barbara. A moment before, on parting with her father, she was aware of a new and disturbing loneliness, but now she felt no longer with the same melancholy that she was solitary, apart from her fellows.

It was the time when the country was divided between the followers of the Throne and the followers of Cromwell; the time when sour visages, who were for the moment in the places of authority, glowered beneath black hats, and the village games were forbidden; the time when Royalist gentlemen dropped a crumb into their wine-glasses after dinner, and, looking meaningly at each other, tossed off the red liquor, saying fervently as they did so, "God send this *crumb well* down." But actual fighting was over, and the country on the surface peaceable again, although a word often was sufficient to draw forth steel among the high folks or set an inn full of villagers to fisticuffs. There was not a Royalist in

the country but awaited the moment when he could strike another blow to avenge his dead master and reinstate his young Prince. Among these loyal gentlemen Colonel Myddelton was not the least.

Colonel Myddelton was a widower, and Barbara, young though she was, had long acted as the mistress of the household. Yet, in spite of her good sense and caution, Barbara had been the obstacle to the Colonel's departure. She was, he considered, unfit to be left alone with no more stalwart companions than old Digger, the maids, and the children; but her repeated assurances that she felt no foreboding at last conquered, and that morning, as we have seen, he had ridden off.

"You know, father," she had told him again and again, "Philip is close at hand, and truly I can see no danger. Was not I alone for days and nights together when you were with the King and the Prince?"

"Well, well," the Colonel had responded

at last; "but I shall speak a word to Matthew as I pass the forge to-day, and he will keep his eye on the place." Matthew Hale, the blacksmith, had served under Colonel Myddelton in more than one campaign, and he rang as true as his own anvil.

Thus it was that Barbara was left alone in the great house, with none to bear her company but Jack, who was but twelve, and Marjorie, who was but eight, and little Alys, and old Digger, the odd man, and the maids. There were also, it is true, stablemen and gardeners, but they lived in the village.

The next of age to Barbara was Philip (Philip Sidney Myddelton in full, so named after that sweet and noble gentleman and soldier who fell at Zutphen). Philip was sixteen, and at this time was still at his lessons with Mr. Fullarton, of Framshott, a village eight miles distant. Mr. Fullarton was a ripe scholar who kept a house wherein some score of boys

whose parents had no strong liking for the great grammar schools were received and fitted with enough learning to take them into Oxford or Cambridge. The boys ranged in age from ten to seventeen, and at this time Philip was their leader. None could shoot with a crossbow as skilfully as he (that very spring he had killed twenty-three water-rats, and you know how wary they are); none was so fearless a rider; none more expert at flying the hawk or training hounds. The boys' worthy instructor received a liberal sum in payment for his services, and his house was thus made more of a home than a mere school. Each boy who wanted it was permitted to keep his own horse and dog, and after lessons were over their liberty was little encroached upon, provided that they observed the rules of the house.

The Reverend Jeremy Fullarton was Royalist to the marrow, and only Royalists entrusted their sons to his keeping; hence

the house was a home of Cavalier sentiment. The older boys had even constituted themselves into a little corps, and all games had given way before the joys of drilling and military tactics. Here again Philip led, although his sworn allies, Hugh Lorimer and Vernon Hutchinson (a nephew of the great Colonel Hutchinson, whose memoirs were written by his wife Lucy) and Rupert Ommaney, shared the command. Not often do you find a bond uniting as many as four schoolboys in devoted friendship, but such was the case with this gallant quartet, Philip and Hugh, Rupert and Vernon.

"Is it interesting?" the little old lady asked earnestly.

"Very," said Janet.

"I like Barbara," said Hester.

"I like Philip," said Gregory.

Godfrey Fairfax was about to begin again, when Horace interrupted.

"Excuse me," he said. "but I've been thinking. Didn't you write 'For the Good Cause'?"

"Yes," she said.

"Why," said Horace, "that's my favourite book. You remember that, Jack? The Wars of the Roses and the Yorkist family? You must remember where the spy — Giles Featherhead — is caught in the buttery, and how they duck him?"

"Of course I do," said Jack. "It's perfectly ripping."

Godfrey Fairfax was so pleased to hear this that her voice for a moment or two was quite husky. Then she resumed.

In the evening Matthew Hale appeared bearing a basket of tools, and insisted upon testing all locks and bolts, and Barbara and he explored the house together, making all safe with the exception of a window in the library. This room was on the ground-floor, easily accessible, and,

try as he would, there was one window which the blacksmith could not secure. The good fellow was for sleeping on the floor all night by way of guard, but Barbara would not hear of it, and, in the end, Bevis, the mastiff, the great dog that had followed Colonel Myddelton into camp in the late war, was chained outside the window. Satisfied with this arrangement, Matthew pulled his forelock and said good night, and Barbara prepared for bed.

Folks kept better hours in those days than we now do. First she peeped in at the sleeping children. Then she talked long and earnestly with the cook concerning the morrow's programme, and at nine o'clock she climbed to her room.

Barbara, however, could not sleep; so, after an hour or two had passed, she rose, lit a candle, threw on a wrap, and descended the broad staircase, intent upon a queer and enthralling Spanish book — the story of a mad knight and his comic,

matter-of-fact attendant, which was a favourite of her father's.

The book was wont to stand in a corner of the library close to his hand as he sat writing by the window, and, opening the door, Barbara crossed the floor with her hand outstretched to take it. So familiar was she with the mad knight's position on the shelves that she carried no light.

Her hand was within a yard of the sheepskin cover when she leaped back with frozen blood, for there, a foot from her, in her father's chair, was the figure of a man. Instantly she remembered the open window. A breath from the roses floated in and fanned her face; until her dying day Barbara had but to be conscious of the scent of roses to see again that darkened room, to feel again that tightening of the heart. She could neither scream nor move.

The tension was snapped by the man

himself, who suddenly awoke and stretched his arms, and, in doing so, smote Barbara on the shoulder. He sprang to his feet with a cry of astonishment and apology, and at that moment she was herself again.

"A thousand pardons," he said, bowing low before her.

"Who — who are you?" Barbara found words to ask. "And what is your business here? It is no part of a gentleman's behaviour to enter houses by the window."

"Nay," said the man, and Barbara noted that his speech was of one gently born — "nay, it is truly no gentleman's conduct, but in these days, when Kings are laid low at the hands of traitors" — and his voice had a bitter ring — "and rebels sit in high places, a gentleman must perforce descend to trickery and meanness now and then."

Barbara repeated her question. "But tell me who you are, and what you want? There is a gate to the place; there are

servants to open it. Why did you steal upon us thus? And Bevis?" she added, as a sudden misgiving seized her, "he was chained by the window. Have you killed him? Oh, say you have not hurt Bevis?"

"Nay, I could not hurt an old friend," said the stranger. "Bevis and I are old friends. He remembered me at once."

Barbara's fear diminished somewhat at these words. "Old friends!" she exclaimed, half reassured.

"Yes," said the stranger, "we were together in the west. Colonel Myddelton, whom I have striven hither to talk with, and I went through a campaign together; a futile campaign, I fear, with more of pursuit than pursuing, but for a high cause. I' faith, it seems my lot to be pursued. And you, fair lady (for, dark though it is, I know you are fair), are you Colonel Myddelton's daughter, the mistress Barbara, of whom he has told me?"

"I am Colonel Myddelton's daughter," said Barbara. "But you, sir?"

"Right, right," the stranger replied, more gaily; "you ply me hard, but my name stays secret, none the less. Yet this ring may perhaps convince you I am no common housebreaker. See, it was the gift of your father, and a passport, so he said, to Myddelton Hall by day or night." And he stretched forth a ring, which Barbara immediately recognized as an old signet of her father's which suddenly he had ceased to wear, he said not why. She was partially satisfied. "And Bevis," added the stranger — "take it, will you not, dear lady, as a good omen that Bevis let me pass almost unchallenged? But your father," he went on — "is he ill, or away? or will you lead me to him? Had I not fallen asleep, I was about to seek his room. As for entering by the gate, you must know, young mistress, the danger now run by friends of the late King."

"Ah, yes," said Barbara, with a sigh. "My father," she added, "rode this morning to London, where he will be a week yet; but I can tell you where he is lodged. Will you not follow him?"

"London!" the young man repeated, in disappointed tones; "what does he there? London is no place for a true man."

"He has ridden thither," said Barbara, "on matters touching his property, which the rebels would confiscate."

"Rebels!" cried the stranger excitedly. "Ha! a good word in your mouth, young mistress. I like to hear you say that thus roundly. Zounds!" he added; "it is ill news that your father is away, for I have but a few hours in this country, and I must even return without accomplishing my mission. To London I dare not adventure. But, mistress, will you not bring a light, that we may see if we still doubt each other; and then we must talk of a plan of safety."

"Stay where you are," said Barbara, "and I will fetch a candle."

During her absence the stranger had not moved. As she entered he stepped forward and took the light from her, holding it high and scrutinizing her face narrowly.

"Ah!" he exclaimed at last, with a sigh; "good as gold! Would that other lands could breed such grace! It is ill to be banished from one's own countrywomen."

Barbara blushed and turned away.

The young man, who was soberly clad, had dark, almost black hair, and dark eyes. His mouth was perhaps too loose, but he was prepossessing. A certain melancholy, an air of bafflement, seemed to overshadow him. Barbara's sympathy was his at that moment, and he knew it.

"There is a hiding-place in the house," he said, after a pause; "your father has told me of it."

Barbara started; but at these words, her last suspicion vanished. "There is," she replied simply.

"Then will you lodge me there?" the stranger answered. "The gravest issues depend upon the success with which my visit here is kept secret. So far, I believe I have eluded suspicion and pursuit, but these Roundheads are cunning as jackals. And, dear preserver, might I crave some food and drink?"

"Alas!" exclaimed Barbara, "I have delayed hospitality too long. But, you see," she added, smiling, "such visitors are rare at Myddelton Hall. Our gates fly wide to welcome my father's friends when we know of their approach, I assure you, sir."

The stranger bowed, and, smiling in reply, lost for the moment his air of melancholy.

"Your hiding-place is close at hand," she said, and looked again at the ring.

It was certainly her father's; she had often seen it on his hand. And Bevis, too? No, there could be no longer any doubt as to the stranger's genuineness. At least, if there were, she banished it forthwith, for, moving swiftly to the door, she locked it, and then, crossing the room to the fireplace, held up the light and revealed a portrait of an elderly man in Elizabethan costume.

"My great-grandfather," she said, "with whom, as I will show you, liberties have been taken."

So saying, she climbed on a chair, and, reaching upward, pressed her finger against the portrait's right eye. As she did so, a spring was set in motion, and the picture slid upwards, taking the top line of the heavy oak frame with it, and leaving the remaining three sides in their place, disclosing a cavity in the wall.

"Climb in there," Barbara said, handing the candle to the stranger, "and turn

sharp to the right, and then to the left, and you will come to an iron door, which rises and falls like a portcullis. The handle is of no use, but on the ceiling you will see the motto, '*Nil desperandum*,' which you must take as counsel offered to yourself. Press the space in the centre of the D, and the door will open."

The stranger did so.

"Now," Barbara called to him, "wait a little, and I will bring you food."

She replaced the picture, and sought the kitchen, soon returning with the remains of a pasty and a flask of Rhenish, which, after again touching the spring, she handed up to her guest. He took them, and disappeared into the passage, whither, with the assistance of a chair and a scramble, Barbara followed him.

The room was a minute but very complete retreat. A little bed stood in the corner, and by its side a tiny table and chair, on which were writing materials.

"To-morrow, sir," said Barbara, "I will come and inquire after you. You want sleep now. I wish you good rest and good fortune." And, so saying, she left him.

Godfrey Fairfax paused again. "Well," she said, "do you still like it?"

"Very much," said Janet.

"It's very exciting," said Mary.

"I like the hiding-place," said Gregory. "We've just seen one at Salford Hall — only that was for priests — inside a china cupboard. I got in it. The picture's much better."

"Do you like it?" Miss Redstone said to Robert.

"Pretty well," he answered; and they all laughed.

"Don't laugh," said Miss Redstone; "that's just the kind of remark I want. Now take some more cake, all of you, and I will go on."

Barbara awoke almost with the birds, after two or three hours of fitful sleep, and with a rush came the memory of last night's events. Her first thought was for the quick and safe departure of the stranger, and weariness of head told her it was time to seek advice.

"Oh, if father were here!" was the burden of her thoughts. But he was far away, and the immediate question was whom to ask for help. She ticked off the neighbouring gentlemen, and decided against them one by one. Old Digger was useless. Matthew Hale was sound, but stupid. Everything pointed to her brother Philip.

No sooner had she made up her mind than Barbara turned to her writing-table and penned a laborious letter to the Rev. Jeremy. Poor Barbara! Spelling was not her strongest point, nor, indeed, did anyone then mind whether spelling was good or bad. She wrote as follows:

"Deare and Reverend Sir,

"My father has riden to London and I would faine not be without manlie companie in so grate an house (olde Digger being worthie and trustie but a lyttel deaf and stiffe). Therefor I pray you let me have my brother Philip and his friends for this daye that I may be more at mine ease.

"Your servant,

"Barbara Myddelton."

Having sanded and folded the paper Barbara awakened Jack.

"Jack!" she called, shaking him in his bed. "Jack, I have an errand for you. Jump up quickly and dress, and then saddle Roger, and I will get you some food, and then you must ride at a gallop to Framshott to Mr. Fullarton's, and he will send back Philip with you, and Hugh and Vernon and Rupert."

Having seen the little fellow off, Barbara set the servants to work on a business that would keep them remote from

the library, and then visited her guest. She first knocked three times on the chimney — a sign that had been agreed on. After a minute had passed he replied, and, having made certain that no one could enter or see into the library, Barbara removed the picture and waited.

The young man immediately sprang into the room.

"Good morrow, sir," said Barbara simply, with a curtsey.

"Good morrow, fair hostess and preserving angel," said the young man, with a bow.

"We must come to business at once," said Barbara, and forthwith she told him of her message to her brother. "Philip is very young," she added, "but true as steel, and his head is older than his years."

"Good," said the stranger, and he unfolded his plans. That night he must embark for France. He was expected by the master of the *Antelope*, a schooner

lying all ready to weigh anchor at Portallan, the harbour twelve miles distant. She would sail by the night tide, with or without him. It was understood that, if he were not there, evil had befallen him.

"Everything depends," he explained, "on my departure to-night. The cause hangs upon it. A blight on my evil luck!" he cried. "Were Colonel Myddelton at home, I should not be fleeing from my own country empty-handed. I shall be writing to him most of this day, but a spoken word is worth a volume of pen stuff."

It was arranged at length that as soon as the dusk came three of the boys, with the stranger wearing the clothes of the fourth, should ride out, ostensibly on the return to the schoolhouse.

Thus, no suspicion would be aroused, and, once in the road, it would be simple to turn the horses' heads towards the sea and gain the harbour.

That settled, Barbara gave breakfast to

her guest, and he returned to his hiding-place for the rest of the weary day with a store of candles and an armful of books and paper.

Two hours later the boys rode in, all excitement, and Barbara watched them attack the loaded breakfast-table. Philip's friends were, of course, all devoted to this grave, sweet girl, although not bitter rivals.

"Philip dear," said Barbara swiftly, when, after breakfast, she had drawn her brother into her room and locked the door, "there is in the castle at this moment a messenger from the Prince, who has come to see our father on grave business. You can guess what such business would be. He dare not follow him to London, and must leave to-night for the nearest seaport, his errand all unperformed. I sent for you and your friends because the gentleman is our guest, and must be treated with courtesy and care. He is unattended, and the countryside is alive with traitors. You

He returned to his Hiding-place for the Rest of the Weary Day.

and your friends will protect him to-night, will you not?"

"To the death," said Philip.

"Ah, I knew!" said his sister proudly.

"Barbara," exclaimed Philip, "it was fine of you to send for us!" And he hugged her mightily. "But where is the gentleman?"

"In hiding," she answered; "but mind, not a word of this to the others. Tell them enough to stop questions. Not a soul knows he is here save you and me. Later they must know, for one of you will have to lend him clothes. Only three of you can ride as his guard."

"But, Barbara," cried Philip in alarm, "it is not I who will stay behind? It could not be. I am his host. And what build of man is he, Barbara? Say he is not my size."

"No, Phil dear; he is taller by a hand's breadth."

"Ah," sighed Philip, with intense relief, "then it must be Rupert! Poor Rupert!"

"Now," said Barbara, "forget all about it, and have a good holiday with the boys. The evening is distant yet."

"I wish it were here!" Phil exclaimed fervently as he ran off.

Philip at once sought out Rupert, and, slipping his hand into his arm, led him away from the others. He wanted to break the news gently.

"I say, Rupert," he said, "you remember that crossbow of mine you wanted so much?"

Rupert remembered.

"Well, it is yours," said Philip. "And I want you to ride Tiger oftener than you do." (Tiger was Philip's most prized horse.)

Rupert was beginning to be mystified, but he could see that all this was but the preamble to something more important.

"And, Rupert," Philip continued, "you know how keen we all are to smash those Roundheads, don't you?"

Rupert knew.

"But it isn't always possible, you under-

stand, for everyone to fight and be in the front, is it? Some have to do quieter work where they are not seen, haven't they?"

Rupert agreed, a little impatiently. "But Phil," he added, "what does all this mean? What do you want me to do?"

"Well," said Philip, "I can't tell you everything; but to-night it may be necessary for some of us to ride to Portallan, and one to stay behind, and I thought I would try to make it easier for you to be the one to stay behind, that's all. It must be you, I'm afraid, poor old fellow!"

The reader paused again.

"I like that bit about spelling," said Jack.

"I think Barbara and Philip were very lucky," said Robert. "There's no fun like that now. Why is all the fun in the past?"

"I think it's fun to go for a caravan-tour," said Miss Redstone; "and that's in the present."

"Oh, yes," said Robert, "that's fun, no

doubt; but it doesn't compare with fighting against Roundheads."

"I think Barbara was most horribly lucky," said Hester, "because, of course, the stranger was ——"

"Hush!" said the author; and she began to read once more.

The day wore on slowly. Barbara did her best to go through the household duties naturally, but the tension was severe. She was perpetually conscious of a fear that, after all, in spite of his confidence in his skill, the stranger might have been tracked and pursued.

She had, indeed, in the peace of the afternoon, but just dismissed the suspicion, when the white face of Philip appearing suddenly at the door of the library, where she was sitting, brought back all her tremors.

"Roundheads!" he gasped.

Her heart stood still. "Oh, if father were here!" was all she could murmur

moaningly, as the clatter of hoofs rung out in the courtyard.

A minute later old Digger tottered in, shaking like a reed, followed by an officer and three soldiers. Barbara rose to meet them, biting her lips to repress her emotion. "What is it?" she inquired coldly.

"Guard the doors and the windows!" said the Captain to his men, ignoring her. He looked round the room, and then condescended to reply.

"We are seeking a rebel," he said. "He has been traced to this neighbourhood, and it would be natural for him to seek hospitality here. The Myddeltons are fond of such dirt."

"This roof shelters no rebels," said Barbara simply.

"Colonel Myddelton, this doddering old fool tells me," said the Captain, indicating Digger, "is away."

"Clearly," said Barbara, "or your language would be more guarded."

"And no one has come seeking refuge?" the Captain pursued, adding, to Barbara's intense relief: "But asking questions is sheer waste of breath. I have no time to talk. We must search the house."

Barbara sank into her chair again. Surely they must hear the beating of her heart, she thought. Oh, anything, anything to appear calm! The risk was double — first, that they might themselves discover the secret place; secondly, that in tapping the walls, as they were even now doing, they might give her signal to the fugitive, and thus cause him to betray himself. She buried her face in her embroidery, but was aware that the Captain's eyes were on her. The soldiers were passing round the room slowly, thoroughly. In the stress of her perturbation Barbara rose and moved to the door, controlling her agitation with a tremendous effort.

"Follow the lady," said the Captain to one of the soldiers. "Don't lose sight of

We are seeking a Rebel.

her for a moment." ("The minx knows something," he muttered in his moustache.)

"You brute!" cried Philip, drawing his sword. "Do you dare to order my sister to be dogged? Come on." And he made a lunge at the Roundhead.

"Steady!" said the Captain, parrying the thrust — "steady, young fellow!"

Barbara, catching at the door, screamed and swooned.

Philip thrust at him again.

"Be still," muttered the Captain; "we must have no bloodshed here." And he twitched the weapon from the boy's hand, adding: "Very well, I withdraw the order. Carry your sister to her room, and my soldier shall merely stand sentinel at her door. Another word, you puppy, and I'll have you in irons!"

With an effort Philip obeyed, remembering the duty the night held for him; and he and Digger together carried Barbara to her

room, followed by the soldier, who took up his stand at the door.

On resuming their search, the soldiers did no more than thrust their pikes up the chimney, and in a few minutes proceeded to the other rooms.

An hour later the Captain sent for Philip, who sauntered into his presence whistling a country dance.

"I am going at once," said the Captain.

Philip had it in his mind to press him ironically to stay, with a word of regret that his visit was so short; but he stifled the temptation, and simply nodded.

"But I am not in the least satisfied," the Captain continued, "and I mean to leave three soldiers behind to guard the entries and your sister's room. No one leaves the Hall to-night."

Philip's face fell. "But I must," he said. "I am at school at Framshott, and we, my companions and I, must ride back to-night."

"Your companions!" said the Captain.

"Yes," said Philip; "I will call them." And he shouted from the window to the boys playing bowls in the garden.

They came up, and were passed before the scrutinizing eyes of the Roundhead.

"Royalist whelps!" he muttered. "Very well," he said at length, "you may go. But mind, no one else leaves the house."

Then, giving careful instructions to the three men left in charge, he rode off with the others.

News spreads rapidly in villages at all times, and it was, therefore, not surprising that Matthew Hale should hear that there were Roundheads at Myddelton Hall very soon after they had clattered into the courtyard.

"Roundheads at the Hall, are there?" he said. "Then I reckon I'll join them. It won't be the first time I've met a Roundhead — no, nor smashed one, either." So saying, he laid aside his hammer, and, taking instead a bar of iron, he left his boy

in charge of the smithy, and set out for the Hall.

Matthew reached the Hall a few minutes after the Captain and two of the Roundheads had ridden off. The first person he saw was Philip, who, with the three boys and little Jack, were plotting together in the shrubbery.

"Hullo, Matt!" cried Philip; "come here. We want you."

Matthew turned aside from the carriageway, and joined the little group. They all looked profoundly grave and important.

"What is it, young master?" said the blacksmith. "And where's Mistress Barbara? Don't say she's ill."

Then Philip told him the story, omitting all reference to the refugee, whose existence was a secret to the other boys, from the arrival of the Captain to his departure, ending:

"And at this very moment, Matt, there are three Roundhead soldiers on guard in

the Hall — two at the doors, and one standing — can you believe it? — standing at my sister's door. I've fought him once," Philip continued, "but he's too strong, and now the others are keeping us out of the house, and we've charged them several times, but without doing any good, and there are a thousand reasons why we shouldn't any of us be hurt."

"But where are the grooms and gardeners?" Matthew asked.

"Oh, they all disappeared," said Philip. "I suppose they feared an inquiry might be dangerous. It's bad for the health and reputation to fight a Roundhead."

Matthew laughed grimly. "It's bad for the Roundhead's health if he runs against this," he said, raising the iron bar.

At this moment Jack interrupted. "See, Phil," he cried, "Barbara's waving to you at the window."

It was so. They all glanced up, and at the window Barbara's pale face was visible.

A sudden thought came to Philip, and, leading Matthew into the open, he pointed to the blacksmith, and threw an inquiring look to his sister. She hesitated a second or two, and then nodded yes with cheery emphasis, so Philip led Matthew away and supplemented the story he had already told him with the startling announcement that all the time there actually was a fugitive Cavalier in the house.

Matthew Hale whistled; he had no words.

"And he must reach Portallan," said Philip, "to catch the midnight tide. Three of us are going to ride with him, and he takes Rupert's clothes. We should have got him away finely if it hadn't been for these soldiers."

"Then we must smash the soldiers," said Matthew simply. "How many are they? Three, and one of them upstairs. And we are five, not counting Master Jack. Very well. So long as they don't use gunpowder, we can beat them."

In a few minutes the old soldier had sketched out a plan of action.

Godfrey Fairfax again paused.

"It's getting rather good," said Robert. "How splendid if we could have a civil war now!"

"I like Matthew Hale best," said Gregory.

"Are they really going to fight? Are the boys really going to kill anyone? It's so rotten in most stories, because they only talk about it."

"Wait," said the author.

The sentinels were stationed each at one door at the back of the house, twenty or thirty yards apart. The principal entrance they had locked, so that there remained to guard only the two doors into the court-yard. Their instructions were to permit the boys to pass in and out, and to ride off at evening unmolested, but the attacks made upon them prompted the additional pre-

caution to keep the aggressive four out of the house altogether. The two men walked up and down at their posts, and occasionally exchanged a remark together, and occasionally threw a glance at the shrubbery. They seemed, however, to feel no apprehension.

"Can any one of you climb?" the blacksmith asked suddenly.

"I can," said Jack.

"Famous!" said the blacksmith; "then come with me." So saying, he led the way down the shrubbery until the front of the house was in view. "Now," he added, "you shall climb that pipe." And he pointed to a pipe by the doorway. "The ivy will help you."

"And when I am at the top?" Jack asked.

"When you are at the top," said the blacksmith, "you will loosen a stone and drop it on the head of one of your friends yonder" — indicating the courtyard with a jerk of

his head. "That will settle him. At the same moment I'll overwhelm the other. We must prevent them firing at any costs. But don't miss him, whatever you do, or we are worse off than before."

"No," said Jack, "I shall aim very carefully. I will wait till he is exactly underneath, and then, plob! It will get him on his topknot."

The ivy was, of course, out of sight of the two sentries so long as they stayed at their posts; but, as anyone who knows Myddelton Hall, which is little altered since that time, will understand, a very trifling extension of his beat would bring one of them into a position to command the carriage-drive which Jack had to cross to get from the shrubbery to the house. However, the boy sauntered off, looking as aimless as a piece of floating thistledown, and gained the house unperceived. Directly he was past the soldiers' line of vision he became brisker, and in a few minutes the party in

the shrubbery, who had by this time returned to their original post, and at the point in the bushes nearest to the sentries, saw him scrambling over the roof.

"If he were hurt," said the blacksmith, "the Colonel would never forgive me."

"He's climbed that too often for danger of accidents," said Philip.

Jack was now crawling along a coping just over the farther sentry, and they watched him picking out the mortar from between two big stones with his knife. In five minutes he had it loose, and, grasping it with both hands, he pushed it close to the edge, and then peeped over. The soldier was some yards from the plumb. Jack looked down at the shrubbery for guidance. The smith raised his hand to signify patience. Jack waited. Breathlessly the ambushed party watched the two soldiers, who were now talking together. Would they never return to their doors? Five anxious minutes passed, and then, with a

DOWN HE FELL WITHOUT A SOUND.

look round, Jack's man began to move nearer his position under the coping. Once he stopped, and, retracing half a step, called out a facetious after-thought. The boys grunted impatiently, and the blacksmith swore in his beard. Then the soldier took another step back, laughing at his wit, yet moving irresolutely, as though he had another word or two to add to the joke. After this his progress backwards was steady.

At last, when he was within a yard of the precise spot, and not one of the attacking-party had a grain of patience left, the smith dropped his hand, and Jack toppled the stone over the edge. It fell with a terrible swiftness; the soldier completed his yard of step, and the block took him, not on the crown, but on the right shoulder. It was, however, enough. Down he fell without a sound.

His companion, glancing up at the instant, saw him fall, and, leaving his matchlock, ran to his assistance. At the same moment the

smith and the boys rushed from the shrubbery. The soldier, running towards his friend, observed them approaching, checked himself in bewilderment, and then swung round on his heel and made for his weapon. But Matthew was too quick for him. The smith was quite twenty yards distant, but, gathering himself together, he flung out his arm, and with all his might threw the iron bar at the retreating sentry. The missile sped true; over and over it twisted in the air, and, catching the soldier with a horrid thud in the back, laid him low.

"Hurrah!" cried Philip.

"Hurrah!" cried Jack, peering down from the roof as the others bound the two wounded men with ropes. It was quickly done, and they were hauled into the stable and secured safely therein, and old Digger told off to watch them and mind them as well as he might.

"Now we can go ahead," was Matthew's comment, grimly uttered, as he opened the

door. Philip was for accompanying him, but Matthew said no. "In a minute or two I will be back with your sister," he added. "I want to settle the other man alone. I have a few scores to pay off."

He sprang up the stairs three at a bound, grasping his iron bar firmly, and at last came to Barbara's landing. There before the door stood the Roundhead, who evidently had heard nothing of the disturbance below.

"Ha, smith," he cried, on spying Matthew, "what are you looking for?"

"I came to have a little talk," said Matthew easily, taking in his man with a quick glance.

"Well, then, you had best descend those stairs again," replied the soldier; "I'm in no mood for talking."

"Now, that's curious," said Matthew genially, leaning against the wall, "because I am. I never felt more disposed to conversation in my life."

The soldier scowled and fingered his matchlock.

"But perhaps," Matthew continued, darting forward suddenly, and with a blow of the iron bar knocking the gun from the man's hand — "perhaps a little tussle would be more to your liking. I have a mind to smash your face. What do you say?"

The soldier drew his sword.

"No," said Matthew, striking it down with the bar; "I don't want iron. It's so noisy. I have the sound of iron all day in my smithy. Give me a little change." He kicked the sword along the passage, and threw his bar after it.

"Now," said he, "we are equal. Come!"

So saying, the blacksmith tapped the Roundhead on the chin. The soldier made an attempt to defend himself, but fisticuffs were out of his line, and Matthew had a series of easy openings. The smith punished him badly for a while, and then, remarking that he had set his heart on spoiling one or

two more Roundheads before he died, followed the words with a blow on the soldier's nose that laid him low.

The blacksmith pulled himself together, and then, opening a cupboard door near by, pushed the sentry into it and turned the key.

The next thing was to liberate Barbara, who, when she heard what had happened, asked with nice tact if Matthew did not think that they could talk more comfortably in the kitchen, and Matthew replied that his brain was always more fertile in the presence of cold pasty and ale than at any other time.

"Was that all right?" Godfrey Fairfax asked Gregory.

"First-rate," he said. "I can't think why your books don't succeed."

"Perhaps this is the best of them," Robert suggested.

"Barbara is very brave," said Janet. "I admire her tremendously."

"And Philip, too," said Hester.

"Oh, but Jack and the stone is best," said Gregory. "I could have done that."

"So could I," said Horace Campbell; "it's just what I want to do — things like that."

"You're rather blood-thirsty little boys," said Godfrey Fairfax. "Perhaps I had better begin again. It is going to be quieter now."

Once in the kitchen, Barbara and Philip and the blacksmith took rapid counsel together as to the best course of action. It was now late in the afternoon; the Captain might be back with another bodyguard at any time, and, once he returned, there would be no chance of getting the stranger away. It was therefore important to furnish him with the disguise — Rupert's clothes — and spirit him out of the house at once. On the other hand, as he did not count upon being at sea till midnight, this would simply mean exchanging one hiding-place for another;

but, all things considered, it was imperative that he should stay no longer at the Hall.

This decided, Rupert was called in to divest himself of his clothes, and soon afterwards he sent down the bundle, and with it Barbara sought the stranger, while Matthew, feeling very well satisfied with the day's work, sauntered to the stables to examine the wounds of the Roundhead soldiers. He found them groaning, but in a way to recover, and then, calling the boys, he set them to prepare the horses against their journey. It was approaching evening, but the month being June, there was no chance of a dark departure, even if they waited as late as half-past eight, so that one hour of leaving was almost as safe as another.

Barbara found her prisoner very tired of his confinement, and very hungry. She explained the cause of her delay, and, leaving him to change into the clothes as quickly as he might, she hurried off for food. When she came back, the young man, looking for

all the world like a darker Rupert, was standing in the library with his own clothes in his hand.

"My brother will tell you what has been devised for you," Barbara said.

"Thank you," he replied, putting out his hand. "Thank you, sweet preserver. I shall see you again, I know; but it may be long, very long. Will you keep this ring? Show it to your father when he returns, and guard it carefully till we meet in the future. Then you shall give it me once more." He slipped the ring on her finger and kissed it.

A moment later he stood in the courtyard beside Rupert's horse, where the others were waiting.

"Heavens!" said Hugh to Philip; "what's happened to Rupe?"

"Yes," echoed Vernon, "who's that in old Rupe's clothes?"

"Shut up!" Philip hissed, fixing them with a meaning glance. "Say another word, and I'll flay you! That's Rupert Om-

maney, and no one else, and I warn you to remember it."

"Come along, Rupert," he cried cheerily, aloud to the stranger. "It's time we were off."

With that they swung into the saddle, and rattled out of the courtyard, the stranger in the midst. As he rounded the corner of the house he looked back and smiled farewell to Barbara and the smith and Jack, who stood together watching the departure. Barbara waved her hand, and a moment later her fugitive was out of sight.

"That's not all, is it?" Hester inquired anxiously, as Miss Redstone stopped.

"Isn't it a good ending?" she asked.

"No," said Gregory, "of course not. I want to know if he got to the harbour all right, and who he was."

"Oh, I think we know who he was," Janet said.

"Who?" Gregory asked. "I don't know."

"Well, it's not the end," said Miss Redstone; "but the end is very near, and that will explain everything." And she began again.

The boys and their companion had not been gone an hour when in rode the Captain and his two soldiers with a terrible clatter. The Captain leaped from his horse, and strode into the house, roaring for the men he had left on guard. Barbara, who was in the library with Rupert, heard the noise and divined its meaning.

"Rupert," she said swiftly, on a sudden inspiration, "will you add one more kindness to your long list? Will you hide in here for a few minutes?" So saying, she showed him the secret chamber.

Rupert hesitated not a moment, but swung himself up and was lost to view. The picture hardly descended when the Captain entered.

"Ha!" he cried, casting a quick glance at Barbara. "So you have escaped my

soldiers' vigilance. A nice story of traitorous mutiny I shall have to report to London! Three of the Parliament's men beaten and bound, and rebels here in hiding. For there is a hiding-place here, I will lay my life, and by the look in your eyes, mistress, the bird is still in it."

So saying, he set his men once more to work on the walls, and himself attacked the portrait. Barbara stood by watching them. After five minutes' fumbling the spring was touched. The Captain leaped into the cavity, and they heard him utter a cry of triumph. A moment later he came forth, leading Rupert. But his expression of joy vanished when he gained the light, dim though it was, and found that his captive was but a schoolboy, and a laughing one at that.

"Tricked again!" he cried, as he flung the lad off and dashed from the room.

His men followed, and in a moment they were all in the saddle.

Barbara turned to Rupert with a smile. "Thank you!" she said.

"You are splendid!" was all he could say in reply.

"If you will bring me a candle," said Barbara, "I will look at the little room again."

Bidding Rupert remain exactly where he was, she entered the secret room. "The Captain was too impetuous," she remarked, picking up a letter addressed to herself; "he ought to have gone on after discovering Rupert." "To Mistress Myddelton," the superscription ran, and she opened it with trembling fingers.

"Thank you," was all it said, but the signature struck her dizzy. It was the signature of the exiled Prince.

"I knew it!" Hester exclaimed.

"But it doesn't hurt the story to know it?" Miss Redstone asked anxiously.

"Oh, no, not at all," said Janet and Mary. "Please go on."

Miss Redstone resumed.

On leaving the Hall the boys and their companion had turned at once down the highroad in the direction of Mr. Fullarton's at Framshott, which was precisely the opposite direction to Portallan and the sea, Philip's idea being to ride for a few miles as if on the journey back to school, and to be seen by as many people who knew them by sight as possible, then to branch off into a sheltering wood, wait there till dark, and start again, refreshed, in a bee-line for the harbour. In this way the Captain would, if he were to return and follow them, be put on a wrong scent, and give up any chase as a waste of effort.

But Barbara's trick in hiding Rupert undid the plan, for the first person whom the Captain and his men met on leaving the Hall for the second time swore so positively to having seen the *four* schoolboys that the Roundhead's suspicions were at

once aroused, and, turning his horse's head, he led the way at all speed towards Portallan.

"Then there was a man there all the time," he cried bitterly to himself, "and he has escaped in that puppy's clothes! 'Sdeath, if I catch him now . . . !" He ground his teeth together in his rage, and dug the rowels of his spurs into the horse's side. Without another word they rode at the gallop through the growing darkness.

The boys were riding together at a good swinging pace, the stranger, in Rupert's clothes, leading the way by a neck, Philip beside him, and the other two behind. It was not a dark night, but a mist rolling inland from the sea — one of those white mists well known along the south coast, which predicate hot weather — enveloped them impenetrably except at very short range.

"Halt!" they heard the Captain cry, halfway down the hill.

"Ay, it is likely we shall halt for that,"

said the stranger, with a laugh. "I'll show him," and, turning in his saddle, he discharged a pistol down the road. "That's for our enemies," he remarked grimly, "and may it hit someone!"

A few moments later came an answering shot, whistling past their heads ominously.

"Break for the nearest copse," replied the stranger, promptly, "for a council of war. Quick! now's the time! The top of the hill is cover for us." So saying, he put his horse to the bank, cleared it, and galloped over the field to the trees which loomed grey and indefinite before them.

The others followed. In two minutes they were under the boughs. Not daring to breathe, they heard the troopers thunder along the highroad, all unconscious for the moment of the trick that had been played them.

"Now," said the stranger briefly, "we must divide. I shall proceed to Portallan alone very warily."

The faces of the boys fell at these words. Relinquish their duty before a blow had been struck? It was humiliating — impossible. Philip first found voice. "No, sir," he cried emphatically; "nothing of the kind! My sister bade me not leave your side until you embarked for France, and her word is my law."

"And we stand by Phil," said Vernon, with equal emphasis.

"You are brave boys," the stranger answered, "but you must do to-night as I say. There is no time to argue here, and if I miss the tide I am undone, for loyal captains are rare birds, I promise you. There may be not another safe ship this fortnight."

"But the enemy," said Philip,— "you will have to pass them. How can you do that single-handed?"

"Besides," Hugh interpolated, "is it fair to rob us of our sport like this?"

"Yes," said Vernon, supporting him, "it is seldom enough one has any chance of

striking a blow for the cause. We are well armed. We are four to their three."

The young man made a gesture of impatience.

"Peace," he said. "I have told you we must separate; let that be final. You, Philip, shall accompany me part of the way, at any rate — I owe you that; but the others will ride each towards the sea by different but fairly direct ways. They will probably each be pursued, but must do the best they can, avoiding bloodshed if possible. The captain has two men with him, and Vernon and Hugh must each decoy one of them away in pursuit. That will leave merely the captain, who is certain to ride to the port. You, Philip, will divert him, and the way will thus be clear and open to me to get on board. Please God, we all get through safely!"

So saying, the stranger shook hands with Hugh and Vernon, who were convinced by something in his voice that this was their

master and nothing more was to be said, and in a moment he and Philip were gone.

Events happened precisely as the stranger had foretold. Vernon and Hugh, riding full tilt towards Portallan, attracted each a Roundhead soldier, and each boy used his knowledge of the country to lead the men a wild-goose chase. Vernon's pursuer succumbed first, for he and his horse fell into a small but sufficient chalk-pit a mile or two from Framshott just as dawn was breaking. As for Hugh's man, after three hours' zigzag riding through the mist he was deftly persuaded to gallop into the Worminglore bog, and there Hugh, flinging a parting word of derision, left him floundering. The man fired a bullet in the direction of the boy's voice, but it did no harm except to his hat, and only served to increase Hugh's reputation among his companions at school as a desperate fellow. It is not every boy who has a bullet-hole in his hat.

HUGH, FLINGING A PARTING WORD OF DERISION, LEFT HIM FLOUNDERING.

Meanwhile Philip and the stranger spurred to the sea by a devious course. They rode silently, the stranger's hand alert to seize his pistol. Suddenly, when only a mile or two from the harbour, a light or two being visible on the ships riding at anchor, he reined in with a jerk before a shepherd's hut which stood at the edge of a sheepfold on the naked down, a yard from the road.

"Just the thing!" he cried; "we have still an hour."

Bidding Philip stay there and keep watch, he leaped from his horse and opened the door of the hut.

"Who's there?" growled the voice of the shepherd.

"A friend, if you hold your peace," said the young man; "otherwise a foe, and a strong one, I can promise you." He clicked a pistol as he spoke, and the shepherd stood up and pulled his forelock.

"I want no words," said the stranger,

"and no delay. Do as I tell you, in the King's name."

"Ay, marry!" cried the shepherd; "in the King's name I'll do anything."

"Good fellow," said the stranger, "well said. Take off that smock and those leg-casings."

The man took them off. The stranger divested himself of Rupert's clothes at the same time, and hastily donned those of the shepherd. "Tie mine in a bundle," he said to the man. "I shall leave you cold to-night, I fear, but here is money. Lie close in a blanket till the morrow, and then send for your wife to buy other clothes. But keep your tongue from wagging."

So saying, the stranger shouldered his bundle, and, taking the shepherd's crook in his hand, he left the hut and rejoined Philip. "My dear boy," he said, "I must leave you now. I shall creep into the town under cover of this disguise, safely enough, and be on board in half an hour. Farewell. I

shall never forget your services to me, as you will be reminded some day, and from a quarter you least expect." With these words he shook the boy's hand and was lost in the mist.

Philip waited irresolutely for some minutes. Then a plan came to him which, if successful, would make the humiliation of the Roundhead complete. "Yes," he said, "I'll do it;" and forthwith he urged his horse towards the town at a smart trot, leading the other by the reins and talking loudly with its imaginary rider. The ruse was successful. The Roundhead Captain was, as Philip had suspected, in ambush just at the outskirts, all ready to dart forth and at last make the capture. When within a dozen yards of his form, dimly outlined in the fog, Philip loosed the led horse, and lashing it sharply over the flanks, turned his own steed, and rode off at full gallop, which he did not slacken till he reached home. He glowed as he rode.

Barbara's head appeared at the window in response to his clatter. Calling the single word "Safe!" from the gate, he spurred on to Framshott.

"Outwitted clean!" said the Captain to himself, as he came up at last with the riderless animal two hours after. "Outwitted, discredited, and by a parcel of children! However, let's make the best of it;" and so saying, he urged his horse towards Myddelton Hall, leading the stranger's by the bridle.

At three in the morning, when the sun was rising, and the air was sweet and cool, and songs of birds made music all around him, Philip rode into the yard of the school-house. He found Rupert waiting for him.

"Hugh and Vernon are in the kitchen making a famine," said Master Ommaney. "Old Full's down there with them, and he's as pleased as a Merry Andrew about it all! He keeps shaking hands with us."

"It's been grand," said Philip, as he shut

the stable door on his horse. "I'm so sorry you couldn't come, too, Rupe, old boy."

At about the same time the Captain thundered on the Hall door. The blacksmith very deliberately descended the stairs to unlock it. Barbara followed.

"You must give me lodging to-night," the Captain said curtly. "My men will be here soon, and there are three good fellows to be cared for to whom your servants have done serious mischief."

Barbara, looking contrite, told the Captain that a room was at his service, and there was food in the kitchen. He attended first to his horse, and then she set a brave supper before him and the smith.

"Well, young lady," said the Captain at length, "I must compliment you on your cleverness. You nested your bird well, and you saw to it that he flew well, too. All we have to show for it is a broken nose, a broken shoulder, and a broken back. It is a sad business for us all; bad for you, when head-

quarters come to hear of it, and bad for me, in not being sharper. But it might have been worse," he added; "why, the fugitive might have been the Prince himself, instead of this twopenny-halfpenny spy!"

Barbara smiled.

* * * * * * *

In conclusion it may be said that, as it turned out, no more was heard of the matter by Colonel Myddelton. The Roundhead Captain felt that the day's work did not sufficiently redound to his credit, and he shrank from the chaff that would follow when it was known that a girl and some schoolboys had outwitted him. He therefore kept silence.

Some years had to pass before Barbara and Philip received their reward; but one of the first acts of the Merry Monarch on ascending the throne was to make Philip a knight and to send Barbara a pair of very beautiful horses and a carriage.

There was a silence after Godfrey Fairfax had finished.

Then, "Is it true?" Gregory asked.

"Is it a good story?" the author inquired, by way of reply.

"Oh, yes," said Gregory. "Ripping!"

"Then let's consider it true," said Miss Redstone.

"Of course it's true," said Hester.

"Do you like it as well as 'For the Good Cause'?" Miss Redstone asked Horace.

"Not quite," he said, "but very nearly."

"And you?" she inquired of Jack.

"It's jolly interesting," he said, "anyway."

"Well, I'm very much obliged to you for listening to me so long," Miss Redstone said. "You've been very kind, and you've cheered me up extremely. Good-bye. I shall never forget your kindness, and I shall send you the story when it is printed."

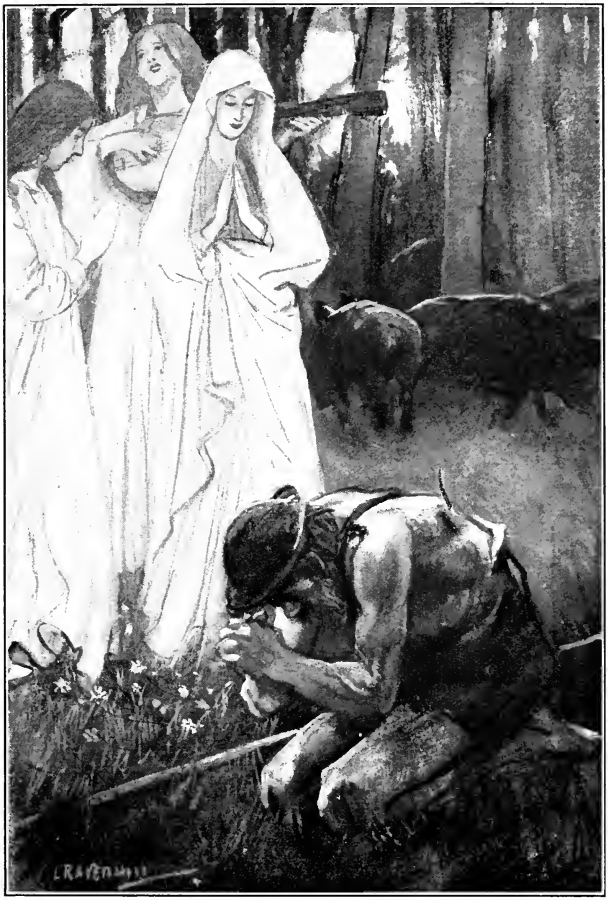
And after giving her their address, they resumed their journey, and discussed the romance at intervals all the way to Bredon Hill.

CHAPTER XV

THE ADVENTURE OF THE RUNAWAY PONIES

THE distance from Evesham to Elmley Castle, a little village under Bredon Hill, is only five or six miles, and the Slowcoaches were comfortably encamped in a field there by six o'clock, for at Evesham they did no more than walk through the churchyard to the beautiful square Bell Tower with its little company of spires on the roof. Mary bought a guide at a shop at the corner of the market-place and read the story.

This Bell Tower, with a gateway and a wall or so, is all that remains of a Benedictine abbey which was built by the Bishop of Worcester in the reign of Ethelred. The Bishop, it seems, had a swineherd named Eoves, who one day, while wandering in the



THE VISION OF EOVES.

Forest of Arden ("In which the scene of 'As You Like It' is laid, Hester, and which used to cover all the ground where Evesham now stands"), was visited in a vision by three radiant damsels. He returned at once and told the Bishop, who, on being led to the same spot, after a preparation of fasting and prayer, had the same vision, and at once recognized the damsels as the Virgin Mary and two Angels.

At that time the meaning of such heavenly visitations was plain, and the Bishop at once set about building an abbey on the spot. He appointed himself the first abbot and named it after his swineherd Eoves — Eoves'ham.

The abbey was large and prosperous, but the Danes destroyed it in one of their raids, and it had to be rebuilt on a more splendid scale. Then came Henry VIII. and his quarrel with the Church of Rome, and the abbey was confiscated and given as a grant to Sir Philip Hoby, one of his friends, who at

once (being a man of the type of the Rev. Francis Gastrell) raised what money he could on it by turning it into a quarry for stones. And that is why so many old houses in this neighbourhood have carved stones in their walls.

The party then returned to the market-place and walked down to the bridge, where they joined Kink and set out for their goal.

Elmley Castle is one street, with a ruined cross at one end and the church at the other, and the great hill over all. The cottages are as white as snowdrops, and they have heavy thatch roofs. The women wear large blue Worcestershire sunbonnets. The only shop is a post-office too, so that Robert was able to send his telegrams very easily.

After supper some of them walked through the churchyard (which has a very curious sun-dial in it) to the meadows beyond, in search of the castle, the site of which is mentioned on the map, but is quite undiscoverable now; while Robert made friends

with an old labourer smoking his pipe outside the great tithe barn, and asked him about the road up Bredon, as it was his project to sleep on the very top of the hill the next night.

Robert made friends with an old labourer.

But the old man changed their plans completely; for he convinced Robert that the Slowcoach would never get to the top without at least two more horses to help, and even then it would be an unwise course to take, because there was no proper road, and it might be badly shaken.

It was therefore arranged that the older and stronger children should take their

lunch to the top of the hill and eat it there, and that Kink, with Hester and Gregory, should go round the hill, which rises all alone from the plain like a great sleeping monster, on the flat roads, and meet them on the other, or south side, at Beckford, in the afternoon; and they should then go on for five or six miles farther to their camping-ground near Oxenton.

The night was uneventful except for a rather startling visit from a peacock, which stood just inside the boys' tent and uttered such sounds as only a peacock can.

Both parties started early the next morning. Gregory and Hester, being for the first time alone as owners of the Slowcoach, were very proud and excited, and Gregory insisted upon Janet giving him two shillings in case of any emergency, although Kink had plenty of money. The nice old women in the Worcestershire sunbonnets came to see them start, and, well supplied with stone ginger-beer from the Queen's Head — Queen Eliza-

beth's head, as it happens — off they went, Gregory beside Kink, and Hester inside reading Hans Andersen's story of the nightingale.

The others, after waving good-bye, set their feet bravely towards the slopes of Bredon Hill — no small undertaking, for it is very steep and the day was hot. But the pathway is pleasant, first passing by the gardens of the great house, where, burning blue on the wall, they saw their visitor of the night; and then through a deep lane to a hillocky meadow, and so up to the turf of the higher slopes, where the views begin, and where it is very agreeable to rest.

But Robert urged them on. "It is quite flat at the top," he said, "and there is a tower at the very edge, and a perfect place for a picnic."

Here we will leave them, climbing pantingly up, and follow the Slowcoach, as Moses drew it steadily along the lanes at the

base of the hill, between the high hedges. At first, as I said, Kink and Gregory walked; but after a while they both sat in front, just over the shafts, and Gregory held the reins (he called it driving), and they discussed life — which means that Gregory asked a thousand questions and Kink did his best to answer or ignore them.

"It's not true, is it, that when all the cows in a field stand up it's going to rain?"

"Don't you think Bredon Hill would be a ripping place to start to fly from?"

"Shall we stop and cook our dinner, or have cold things?"

"It's not true, is it, that whenever you see a white horse you see a red-haired girl? I suppose that means only in London, where there are so many people?"

"Do you know that you can't walk over London Bridge without seeing a white horse?"

"Do you think that Moses is ever going to have a stone in his shoe so that I can get

it out with my knife? Couldn't we drive him over a very stony place?"

"You can't really tell the time by dandelions, can you?"

And so forth, till Kink's head would have ached if he had not trained it not to.

Gregory was rattling on in this way when suddenly they heard a screaming and scrambling and thudding behind them, and a moment later a chaise with a little girl in it, drawn by a pair of grey ponies, dashed past at a fearful pace, only just avoiding the caravan, and disappeared in a cloud of dust; and then after a minute or so came a tremendous shattering crash, and all was still.

"It's a smash-up," said Kink, urging Moses into a trot. "We must help them;" and at the same time Hester's white face appeared at the window and implored Kink to drive faster.

In a minute or so they saw a moving mass at the side of the road, which they knew to

be the broken chaise, and a farm labourer holding the head of the one pony that was on its feet. Kink tied Moses to a gate-post, and ran to the man's help, telling the children to wait a moment. Both were rather frightened, and they stood hand in hand by Moses and watched.

They saw Kink lift something from the chaise and lay it on the grass. Then they saw him hacking at the harness with his pruning-knife until the pony was free, when the man led it to another gate-post and tied it there. Then Kink hacked again, and drew the carriage away from the pony that was lying on the ground; and then he and the man lifted the bundle once more and came with it very carefully to the Slowcoach, Kink calling out to Gregory to open the door and put some pillows on the floor.

When Kink and the man reached the Slowcoach, Hester saw that they were carrying a girl of about her own age, who was lying in their arms quite still, with her eyes closed.

They placed her gently on the cushions, and Kink dashed a little water on her face.

After a moment or so she opened her eyes and asked where she was.

"You're all right," said Hester. "You've had an accident. We're taking care of you."

Then the little girl remembered. "The ponies!" she cried. "Are they hurt?"

"I'm afraid one of them is," said Kink. "But never mind now. The great thing is that you weren't thrown out. Keep quiet now, missie, and we'll look after everything."

But the little girl would not be silenced.

"Which one is hurt?" she asked. "Which one? Is it Marshall or Snelgrove?"

"I don't know," said Kink. "They're both alike."

"Oh, no, they're not," said the little girl. "Marshall has a white star between his eyes. Oh, do say Marshall's all right! Marshall's my very own."

"I'll go and see," said Gregory; and he

ran off, and came back to say that Marshall was the one that seemed to be all right, but Snelgrove had broken his leg and couldn't move.

"Oh, I'm so glad about Marshall," said the girl; "but poor Tommy, how sorry he'll be!"

"See if you can get up, missie," said Kink. "I want to know if you're hurt anywhere."

The little girl sat up and then stood up. "I feel all right," she said, "only very giddy."

Kink uttered a sigh of relief. "Drink this cold water," he said. "That will make you much better. And now tell us all about the accident, because we shall have to let your people know."

"Well," said the little girl, "mother and I were driving to Ashton to see Aunt May; and mother had just got out to leave the *British Workman* at old Mr. Dimmock's, when the ponies took fright and ran away. I held the reins as long as I could, and when

I saw your caravan in front I screamed to warn you, and then there was a terrible crash, and I don't remember anything else."

"And what will your poor mamma be doing?" said Kink.

"Oh, poor mother!" said the little girl. "She'll be so nervous! But she'll be coming after us as fast as she can, because she saw them start off."

"Then I think," said Kink, "the best thing to do is for us to leave this man here to mind the ponies and tell your mamma you're all right; and we'll go on to Ashton as quick as we can, and send back some help. We'll take you to your aunt's, missie, and the man will tell your mamma when she comes up what we've done. I'm so glad you're not hurt."

So Hester and Gregory were left with the little girl, who told them her name was Patricia Mordan, and she was ten, and they lived near Fladbury, and she had a King Charles spaniel; while Kink urged Moses

towards Ashton, which was only a mile or so away.

Hester put the kettle on the Beatrice stove, thinking that tea was the best thing, and Gregory sat down and looked at their guest, and thought what a splendid adventure it was to tell the others about when they met them later.

Patricia, who was now in a deck-chair, examined the caravan in a kind of ecstasy. "What a lovely place it is!" she said. "Do you really live here? How scrumptiously exciting!"

"My bed's over there," said Gregory.

"Where do you stop at night?" Patricia asked.

"I have to go to the farmers and get leave to camp on their land," said Gregory.

"And is it just you two and the driver?" Patricia asked.

"Oh, no," said Gregory; "there are five others, but they are walking over Bredon Hill. They said we could not walk so far,

which is rot, of course; but I'm glad we didn't, because then we shouldn't have been here to save your life."

"Mother will be very grateful to you for being so kind," said Patricia. "Poor mother! she'll be so frightened about me. And Tommy — how dreadful for him to lose Snelgrove!"

"Who's Tommy?" Gregory asked.

"Tommy's my brother," said Patricia. "He's twelve. Aunt May gave Snelgrove to him and Marshall to me last Christmas. They've never run away before. I wish we had a caravan."

"Caravans are very jolly," said Gregory. "Things are always happening, too."

"I'd rather have a sweet grey pony than a caravan," said Hester, bringing a cup of tea.

CHAPTER XVI

THE BLACK SPANIELS

Gregory, who was looking out of the door and meditating an escape from so much dampness, and a conversation on the whole matter with Kink, exclaimed suddenly, "Hello, I guess this is your mother."

"Yes, it is," cried Patricia, standing up and waving her handkerchief to a lady seated in a milk-cart, which was being driven after them at a tremendous pace. "I wondered who she'd get to bring her here, and it's young Daniel Wilson. Tell your man to stop, please."

Mrs. Mordan, whom Gregory thought both a nice and a pretty lady, leapt out of the milk-cart and ran up the steps of the Slowcoach, and mother and daughter hugged each other for quite two minutes,

while Gregory looked at young Daniel Wilson, and Patricia began to cry afresh—this time because she was happy.

Mrs. Mordan was happy too. The grief she had felt for the accident and the injury to poor Snelgrove, whom she had left in agony by the road, passed away when she found her little daughter unhurt.

She sat holding Patricia's hand, and asked Hester a number of questions, and gave her a number of thanks all together.

Gregory meanwhile had got out, and was asking young Daniel Wilson how ponies are shot; and what he did about getting milk to the station when the snow was two feet thick; and if the cows often kicked the buckets over.

"It's not us," said Hester, "it's Kink who was so useful."

"Who is Kink?" Mrs. Mordan asked.

"Our gardener," said Hester, "but he drives the caravan for us;" and gradually she told the whole Slowcoach story.

By this time they were at Ashton, and, after giving instructions about looking after the ponies, — sending for a veterinary surgeon and so forth, — Mrs. Mordan showed Kink the way to Aunt May's house, which they reached just before two.

Aunt May was standing by the gate, with five black spaniels about her, looking anxiously down the road — a tall lady with grey hair and top-boots, and a little whip in her hand.

"No," she said, as Kink stopped at the gate, "I don't want any chairs or kettles mended, or, indeed, anything from you at all."

Kink, however, said nothing, but went to the back of the caravan and helped Mrs. Mordan and Patricia down.

"My precious Lina!" exclaimed Aunt May, when she saw them. "Whatever has happened?"

"I'll tell you about it indoors," said Mrs. Mordan. "These kind people are going

AUNT MAY WAS STANDING BY THE GATE.

to stop here for lunch, if you've got enough."

"Of course there's enough," said Aunt May; "but I thought you were gipsies, or tinkers, or something objectionable. You're not a tinker, are you?" she said to Gregory.

"No," he said, "but I'd like to be a gipsy."

And so they reached the house, which was an old-fashioned one, all among dark trees, with a very soft lawn in front of it.

Aunt May told Kink to go round to the back and be sure not to let Diogenes and the dogs fight, and then she began to call at the top of her voice for Simpkins.

After a while Simpkins appeared — an elderly bald man in a dress suit, who was evidently the butler.

"Simpkins," said Aunt May, "there will be two more to lunch, and there's a caravan at the back belonging to this gentleman here," — indicating Gregory, who imme-

diately grew three inches all over, — "and please give the driver a good dinner."

"Yes, my lady," said Simpkins; and Hester and Gregory at once began to look at her with round eyes, for they had never before met anyone who was titled — I mean to speak to, although they had seen the Lord Mayor (who is of course a baronet) in his carriage only last November 9.

"And, Simpkins," said Aunt May, "take Mr. —— What is your name?" she asked Gregory.

"Gregory Bruce Avory," said he.

"Take Mr. Bruce Avory to the Pink Room, and get him some hot water."

"Yes, my lady," said Simpkins, and Gregory grew another inch all over.

And then Aunt May led the others upstairs.

Gregory finished his washing first, and walked to the dining-room, which opened on to the lawn, and was very bright and sweet-smelling. The walls were covered with pictures, and there were roses in blue

bowls wherever a place could be found for them.

By the wall, in a row, were five round baskets, and directly Aunt May came in the five black spaniels, who were with her, went each to his basket, and lay there quietly, with his head resting on the edge and his eyes fixed on his mistress. Their names were Mars, Saturn, Orion, Mercury, and Jupiter; and from time to time Aunt May called one to her and gave it a little piece of food, while the others glittered with expectation.

"Now," said Aunt May, "let's get on with our eatin', for I'm sure you're all hungry, and I know I am. Patricia dear, do you think you can eat solid things, or shall we get something else?"

Patricia, however, declared that she could eat anything.

"Mr. Bruce Avory," said Aunt May, "you're drinkin' nothing. Would you rather have lemonade or barley-water?"

Poor Gregory! he knew what he wanted — lemonade — but he didn't know whether he ought to address Aunt May as "My Lady" or "Your Ladyship" or "Lady Rusper." He had tried to get a moment with Hester to ask about it, but without success.

"If she was only our aunt!" he thought, and then said, without using any name at all, that he would like lemonade.

Lady Rusper made them tell her the story all through once again, "right from the beginnin'," as she called it; and just as Hester had got to the end of her part of it a boy arrived leading Marshall, and Patricia leaped up and rushed across the lawn to fondle her pony. Then she dashed back for a piece of sugar, and was off again. The boy said that the blacksmith, who was also a farrier, had seen Marshall, and declared he was quite sound; but Snelgrove was done for completely, and the trap was too badly smashed ever to be much use.

"Put Marshall in the stable," said Aunt May, "and have the trap brought here."

At the news about Snelgrove Patricia began to cry again.

"Well," said Aunt May, "we must see what can be done. I dare say there are more ponies in the world. But I suppose we shall all be driven to motors before long. It's a great shame. I spend most of my time detestin' the things; but they've got to come. And now," she said to Hester, "tell me all about your home and your caravan;" and Hester again told the story, saying "Lady Rusper" with an ease that made Gregory gasp.

After lunch they all went to the stables, where, in a loose-box, beautifully snug in the straw, lay another black spaniel, Venus, with three puppies ("Oh, the darlings!" cried Hester) snuggling to her.

"Do you think your mother would let you keep a spaniel?" Aunt May asked.

"Oh, yes, now we've got Diogenes as a start," she answered.

"Very well, then," said Aunt May, "if you'd like one of these, you shall have it directly it's old enough to be sent away — as a memory of to-day, and as a thank-offerin', too. Which would you like," she added, "Psyche, Cicero, or Circe? This is Cicero, this is Circe, and this is Psyche."

"Why do all their names begin with 'S'?" Gregory asked; and it was not till he told Janet about it that he understood why it was that everyone had laughed so.

"And if you may keep two," Aunt May went on, speaking to Gregory, "I shall send you one of the next litter. Vesta is going to have puppies soon. You must write and let me know. And now, if your man has finished, I expect you'd like to be gettin' on, or the others will be nervous about you."

And so, after Hester had chosen Circe, they all said very affectionate farewells, and the Slowcoach rumbled forth again.

Meanwhile, what of Janet and Robert and Mary and Jack and Horace? They had had

no adventures at all — nothing but scenery and a pleasant picnic.

Robert had been rightly told about the summit of Bredon Hill, for there the grass is as short as on the South Downs, and there is a deep fosse in which to shelter from the wind.

The hill at this western point ends suddenly, at a kind of precipice, and you look right over the valley of the Avon and the Severn to the Malverns. Just below on the south-west is Tewkesbury, where the Severn and the Avon meet, after that becoming the Severn only all the way to Bristol and the sea. In the far south-west rises the point of the Sugar Loaf at Abergavenny, and the blue distance is Wales — the country of King Arthur and Malory.

To the north-west is the smoke of Worcester, and immediately beneath the hill, winding shiningly about, is the Avon, running by Bredon village and the Combertons and Pershore, past Cropthorne (where

Mr. MacAngus was perhaps even now painting) and Wood Norton (where the Duke of Orleans, who ought, Hester held, to be King of France to-day, lives) to Evesham, and the weir where they had rowed about, and so on to Stratford.

Robert's maps, fortified by what he had picked up from the old man last night, told them all these things, and told them also, more or less, what the "coloured counties" were that they could see; for of course Mary wanted to know that: Warwickshire, Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire, Worcestershire, Herefordshire, Monmouthshire. After lunch Mary sang the beautiful Bredon Hill song to them; and so they descended to the level ground and to Kink and Hester and Gregory, little expecting to find them with such exciting things to tell.

From Beckford to Oxenton the great story lasted, eked out with questions and answers as it proceeded. Thus, Horace wanted to know why Kink had not sprung to the

horses' heads and checked them in their wild career.

"We couldn't see them," said Gregory; "they were coming up behind, and we were sitting in front."

Horace was dissatisfied.

"What frightened them?" Jack wanted to know; but Gregory could not say. Patricia had not explained.

"Fancy not knowing what frightened them!" said Jack.

The fact was that both Jack and Horace were a little overtired, and perhaps a little jealous of the eventfulness of the Slowcoach's day.

They had been talking so hard that they had not noticed the sky; and the splashing of raindrops was the first knowledge they had that a storm was coming. It was nearly seven, and suddenly they all knew that they were very tired and hungry and rather chilly. Kink stopped Moses and suggested camping at once.

"Where?" said Robert.

"Here," said Kink. "Under these trees. There'll be a downpour soon: better get your supper at once."

They therefore did not make any effort to find a farm, but instantly unpacked. Hitherto everything had gone smoothly, but this was a bad evening. Nothing seemed to be in its place, and Hester, whose duty it was to get enough dry wood, had forgotten all about it, and by the time a new bundle could be brought it was damp. Then the matches blew out, and then, when at last the fire was alight, the wind scattered the flames so that there was no heat under the pot for more than a moment at a time. This often happens when you are on caravan excursions.

Mary had arranged for a stew, but she soon discovered that there was no chance of its being done for hours unless it could be moved into the Slowcoach and cooked over the Beatrice stove; but when they got

Beatrice out, she was found to be empty, and no more oil was in the can.

"Who is the Keeper of the Oil?" Mary asked severely.

"I am," said Jack.

"Then where is it?" they asked.

"I had it filled at Stratford," said Jack. "Why," he exclaimed, "there's a hole in it! It's all run away! How ghastly! It will be all over everything."

And so it was; and the worst of it was that it had leaked into the biscuits, too. Janet came to the rescue. "We must make it a tongue and banana meal," she said.

"I hate bananas," said Gregory.

"Now, Horace," said Janet, "where's the tin-opener?"

How is it that everything goes wrong at once? Horace had to hunt for the tin-opener for twenty minutes, and turn the whole place upside down before he could find it, and then it was too late.

Meanwhile the rain was steadily falling,

and Kink and Robert were busy getting up the tents before the ground underneath was too wet. Robert was the only happy one. A few difficulties seemed to him to make the expedition more real.

He came dripping into the Slowcoach and asked for his supper; but Horace was still hunting for the tin-opener.

"Never mind about it," said Robert. "I'll open the thing with the hammer and a knife. But what you want, Horace, is system."

"No; what I want is food," said Horace. "I'm dying."

"So am I," said Gregory.

"Well, eat a crust to go on with," said Janet. "There's the bread."

"I hate crusts," said Gregory.

"Surely crusts are better than dying of starvation," said Mary.

"No," said Gregory, who was prepared to be thoroughly unpleasant. "No, I'd much rather die. I think I shall go to bed."

"Yes," said Robert, "do. People who can't stand a little hunger are no good in caravans."

"Janet," said Gregory, "how can I go to bed with my boots on?"

"Then take them off," said Janet.

"There's a knot," said Gregory.

"Well, you must wait," said Janet. "I can't leave what I'm doing."

"I hate waiting," said Gregory.

Robert, however, became suddenly very stern. He advanced on Gregory with a knife in his hand, and, swooping on the boot, cut both laces. "There," he said, "get into bed, and you must buy some more laces at Cheltenham."

"I hate Cheltenham," said Gregory. But he said no more; he saw that Robert was cross.

When, a little later, Janet took a plate of tongue over to his bunk, he was fast asleep. The others had a dismal, grumpy meal, and they were glad when the washing-up was

done and it was bedtime. But no one had a good night. The rain dropped from the trees on to the Slowcoach's roof with loud thuds, and at midnight the thunder and lightning began, and Janet got up and splashed out in the wet to the tent to ask Robert if they ought not to move from under the trees. Robert had been lying awake thinking the same thing, but Kink had gone off with Moses to the nearest farm, and the Slowcoach was far too heavy to move without the horse. Diogenes whimpered on his chain. If he could have spoken, he would have said, like Gregory, "I hate thunder."

"Perhaps it won't get very near us," said Robert. "We must chance it, anyway."

But neither he nor Janet had any sleep until it was nearly time to get up, when the sun began to shine again, and the miseries of the evening and night before were forgotten.

Hester, however, had slept all through it, and had dreamed that ponies were running

away with her towards a country entirely peopled by black spaniels and governed by a grey queen in top-boots.

As for Gregory, his dream was that he was Lord Bruce.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ADVENTURE OF THE LOST BABY

They entered Cheltenham at about half-past eleven, and were having lunch on the top of Leckhampton Hill, on the other side of it, by half-past one. Robert had not allowed any stop in Cheltenham except for shopping. "We don't want towns," he said, "except historic ones."

"But this is historic," said Jack; "Jessop was at school here."

The pull up Leckhampton Hill was very stiff, and they were all glad to take lunch easily, and since Robert had arranged a short day — only three or four miles more, to a very nice-looking spot on the other side of Birdlip — they rested with clear consciences; and, as it happened, rested again

in the Birdlip Hotel, where they had tea in the garden overlooking the Severn Valley, on the top of just such a precipice as Bredon.

It was half-past three before they started again on their next five miles, and they had done about three of them, and had just passed Teddington, when Gregory, who was walking with Kink beside Moses, suddenly dashed ahead towards a bundle which was lying in the middle of the road.

He bent down over it, and then began to shriek for the others to come too.

"What is it?" cried Jack, as they raced up.

"It's a baby!" Gregory said, wild with excitement. "A real baby!"

Janet, who had been behind, sprang forward as she heard these remarkable words, and easily reached the bundle first.

"So it is," she exclaimed, picking it tenderly up and opening the wraps round its face.

It was a swarthy mite, very tightly bound into its clothes.

"What an extraordinary thing!" said Mary. "Fancy finding a baby on the road!"

"It has probably been abandoned," said Hester. "Very likely it is of noble birth, and was stolen by gipsies and stained brown, and now they are afraid of pursuit and have left it."

"How could it be of noble birth?" Gregory asked. "Look how hideous it is!"

"Looks have nothing to do with high lineage," said Hester. "There have been very ugly kings."

"It isn't hideous," said Janet. "It's a perfect darling. But what are we to do with it?"

"If it's a boy," said Gregory, "let's keep it and make it into a long-stop. We want one badly." (Gregory, as I have said, hated fielding.)

"Let's adopt it," said Hester. "Mother often says how she wishes we were still babies."

"Don't let's adopt it if it's a girl," said Gregory.

"It doesn't matter what a baby is," said Hester, — "whether it's a boy or a girl. The important thing is that it's a baby. When it gets too big, we can let it go."

"I'm dreadfully afraid," said Janet, "that we shall have to try to find out whose it is and give it back now."

"Well," said Mary, "we needn't try too hard, need we?"

"How are you going to try, anyway?" Jack asked, with some scorn. "You can't stop everyone you see and say, 'Have you lost a baby?' This old man just coming along, for instance."

"Wouldn't a good way," said Robert, "be to write a little placard:

FOUND,
A BABY.
Inquire Within.

and stick it on the caravan?"

They liked that idea, but Janet suggested that it would be best to ask Kink first.

"There's only one thing to do," said Kink, "and that is to hand it over to the police at the next place we come to."

"Police again!" said Horace. "You're always talking of the police."

"Well," said Kink, "that's what they're for. And if you think a moment or two, you'll all see what a trouble a baby would be. We shall reach Oxenton in a little while, and we can leave the baby there."

But, as it happened, they had no need to, for there suddenly appeared before them a caravan covered with baskets which was being urged towards them by a young woman who tugged at the horse's head in a kind of frenzy. As she drew nearer they could hear that she was wailing.

"It must be her baby," said Janet, holding the bundle up; but the woman did not see it, and Janet told Jack to run on quickly

and meet her, and tell her that they had the baby and it was not hurt.

Jack did so, and the woman left the horse to be cared for by the man and boy who walked behind, and ran to Janet, and seized the bundle from her, and hugged it so tightly that the baby, for the first time, uttered a little cry.

"Where did you find it?" the gipsy woman asked; and Janet told her the story.

"It must have rolled out of the van while I was in front with the horse," said the gipsy. "We didn't miss it. We've had to come back three miles at least."

By this time the two caravans had met, and the man was brought up by the woman and told the story, and they all expressed their gratitude to Janet for nursing the child so kindly.

"Bless your pretty heart!" the gipsy woman said again and again, while her husband asked if there was anything that they could do for her and her party.

"I don't think so," said Janet. "We liked to take care of it, of course."

The gipsy man asked a number of questions about the Slowcoach, and then suggested that he should show them a good place to camp, and make their fire for them, and he added: "I'll tell you what — you all come and have supper with us. I'll bet you've talked about playing at gipsies often enough; well, we'll get a real gipsy supper — a slap-up one. What's the time?"

He looked at the sun. "Nearly five. Well, we'll have supper at half-past seven, and we'll do you proud. Will you come?"

Janet considered.

"Of course, Janet," said Robert.

"Why don't you say yes?" said Gregory.

Hester shrank a little towards the Slowcoach, and Janet went to talk to Kink.

She came back and thanked the gipsy, but said that they would not all come, but the boys would gladly do so.

"I'm sorry you won't be there," said the

man. "But we'll give the young gents a square meal — and tasty, too! Something to relish! What do you say, now," he asked Gregory, "to a hedgehog? I don't expect you've ever eaten that."

"Hedgehog!" said Gregory. "No, but I've always wanted to." And, in fact, he had been thinking of nothing else for the last five minutes.

"You shall have it," said the man. "Baked or stewed?"

"Which is best?" Gregory asked.

"Stewed," said the man. "But if you'd like it baked —— Or, I'll tell you. We'll have one of each. We got two to-day. This shall be a banquet."

The gipsies really were very grateful folk. The boy got wood for them; the man made their fire — much better than it had ever been made before — and lit it without any paper, and with only one match.

It was at last arranged that they should all share the same supper, although the woman

should sit with the girls and the boys with the man. And so they did; and they found the hedgehog very good, especially the baked one, which had been enclosed in a mould of clay and pushed right into the middle of the fire. It tasted a little like pork, only more delicate.

"When you invited us to come to supper," Robert said, "you asked what the time was, and then looked at the sun and said it was nearly five. And it was — almost exactly. How do you do that?"

"Ah," said the gipsy, "I can't explain. There it is. I know by the sun, but I can't teach you, because you must live out of doors and never have a clock, or it's no good."

"And can you tell it when there's no sun?" Robert asked.

"Pretty well," said the man.

"How lucky you are!" said Horace.

"Well, I don't know," said the man. "What about rain? When it's raining hard, and we're huddling in the van and can't

get any dry sticks for the fire, and our feet are soaked, what are you doing? Why, you're all snug in your houses, with a real roof over you."

"I'd much rather live in a caravan than a house," said Horace.

The man laughed. "You're a young gent out for a spree," he said. "You don't count. You wonder at me," he continued, "being able to tell the time by the skies. But I dare say there's one, at any rate, of you who can find a train in that thing they call Bradshaw, isn't there?"

"I can," said Robert.

"Well, there you are," said the gipsy. "What's luck? Nothing. Everyone's got a little. No one's got much."

"Oh, but the millionaires?" said Horace.

"Millionaires!" said the gipsy. "Why, you don't think they're lucky, do you?"

"I always have done so," said Horace.

"Go on!" said the gipsy. "Why, we're

luckier than what they are. We've got enough to eat and drink,—and no one wants more,—and along with it no rent and taxes, no servants, no tall hats, no offices, no motor-cars, no fear of thieves. Millionaires have no rest at all. No sitting under a tree by the fire smoking a pipe."

"And no hedgehogs," said Gregory.

"No—no hedgehogs. Nothing but butcher's meat that costs its weight in gold. Take my advice, young gents," said the gipsy, "and never envy anybody."

Meanwhile the others were very happy by the Slowcoach fire. The gipsy woman, hugging her baby, kept as close to Janet as if she were a spaniel. Their name was Lee, she said, and they made baskets. They lived at Reading in the winter, and were on the road all the rest of the year. The young boy was her brother. His name was Keziah. Her husband's name was Jasper. The baby's was Rhoda.

Hester was very anxious to ask questions

about kidnapping, but she did not quite like to, and was, in fact, silent.

The gipsy woman noticed it after a while, and remarked upon it. "That little dark one there," she said; "why doesn't she speak?"

Janet said something about Hester being naturally quiet and thoughtful.

"Oh, no," said the woman, "I know what it is: she's frightened of me. She's heard stories about the gipsies stealing children and staining their faces with walnut juice; haven't you, dearie?"

Hester admitted it.

"There," said the woman, laughing triumphantly. "But don't be frightened, dearie," she added. "That's only stories. And even if it ever did happen, it couldn't again, what with railway trains and telegraphs and telephones and motor-cars and newspapers. How could we help being found out? Why," she continued, "so far from stealing children, there was a boy running away from

school once who offered us a pound to let him join our caravan and stain his face and go with us to Bristol, where he could get on to a ship as a stowaway, as he called it; but Jasper wouldn't let him. I wanted to; but Jasper was dead against it. 'No,' he said, 'gipsies have a bad enough time as it is, without getting into trouble helping boys to run away from school.' That shows what we are, dearie," she added to Hester, with a smile.

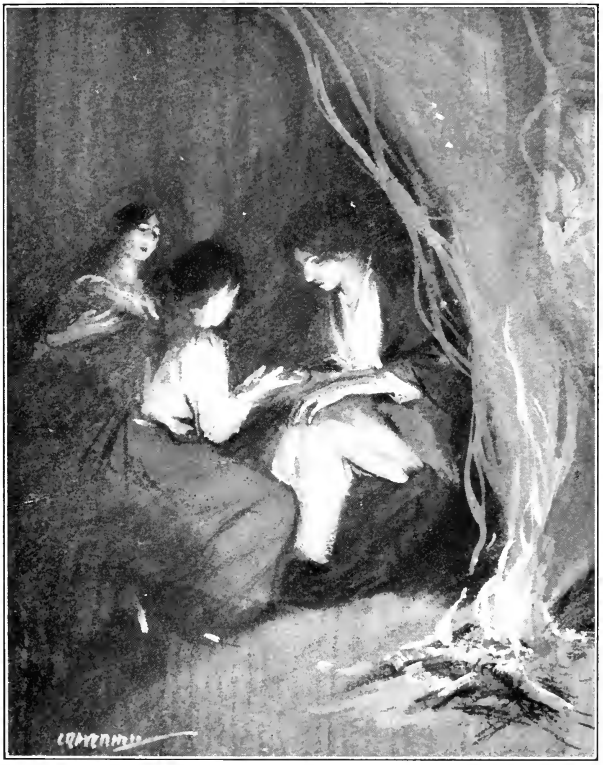
"And don't you ever tell fortunes?" Hester asked.

"I won't say I've never done that," the gipsy said.

"Won't you tell mine?" Hester asked. "I've got a sixpence."

"Just cross my hand with it," said the woman, "but don't give it to me. I couldn't take money from any of you."

So Hester, with her heart beating very fast, crossed the gipsy's hand with the sixpence, and the gipsy held both hers and



I see a Beautiful Wedding, White Satin, Flowers, Bridesmaids.

peered at them very hard while Janet nursed the baby.

"This," said the gipsy at last, "is a very remarkable hand. I see stories and people reading them. I see a dark gentleman and a gentleman of middling colour."

"Yes," said Hester. "Can't you tell me anything more about them?"

"Well," said the gipsy, "I can't, because they are only little boys just now. But I see a beautiful wedding. White satin. Flowers. Bridesmaids."

The gipsy stopped, and Hester drew her hand back. It was terribly romantic and exciting.

Before the woman said good night and went to her caravan, Hester took her sixpence to Kink and asked him to bore a hole in it. And then she threaded it on a piece of string and tied it round the baby's neck.

The gipsy woman was very grateful. "A beautiful wedding," she said again. "Such flowers! Music, too."

"Wasn't it wonderful?" Hester said to Janet before they went to sleep.

"What?" Janet asked.

"The gipsy knowing I was fond of writing."

"No," said Janet, "it wasn't wonderful at all. There was a great ink stain on your finger."

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ADVENTURE OF THE OLD IRISHWOMAN

When they awoke the next morning the gipsies had gone — nothing remained of them but the burnt circle on the ground which any encampment makes and a little rubbish; but at the mouth of the boys' tent lay a bundle of sticks and two rabbits.

Kink looked at the rabbits with a narrow eye. "Better hurry up and get them eaten," he said, "or one of those policemen that Master Campbell is so fond of may be asking awkward questions. And it wouldn't be a bad thing," Kink added, "to have a good look round and see if there's anything missing."

"Oh, Kink," said Janet, "how horrid you are to be so suspicious! And after all their gratitude, too!"

"Yes," said Kink; "but gipsies is gipsies. They were gipsies before they were grateful, and I reckon they'll be gipsies after."

But in spite of his examination he found no signs of any theft.

They were away soon after breakfast, which seemed a little flat at first after the excitement of last night. But they soon lost that feeling in hunger. It was a very windy day, with showers now and then; but it was bracing too, especially on this very high road, hundreds of feet above the sea-level.

Robert pointed out how straight it was, and told them it was made by the Romans eighteen hundred years ago, and it ran right through Cirencester (which they called Corinium) to Speen (which they called Spinæ). Its name was then Ermin Street. And it amused the children to imagine they

too were Romans clanking along this fine highway.

It was after lunch that they came upon an old woman — sitting beside the road just beyond Tredington. Long before they reached her they heard her moaning and groaning.

The old Irishwoman.

"What is it?" Janet asked.

The old woman moaned and groaned.

"Are you ill?" Janet asked.

The old woman groaned and moaned.

"Kinky," said Janet, "come and see if we can help her."

Kink murmured to himself and came to her.

"What's up, missis?" he asked.

"It's my poor heart," said the old woman with an Irish brogue. "I'm very queer. It's near death I am. For the love of Heaven give me a ride in the beautiful caravan."

"Where do you want to go?" Kink growled at her.

"To Alverminster," she said. "To see my daughter. She lives there. She's been married these five years to a carpenter, and she's just had another baby, bless it's wee face! But me poor heart's that bad I can't go another step."

Kink drew Janet aside. "She's an old humbug," he said, "and she smells of gin. Better let her be."

"Oh, Kinky," said Janet, "how can we! The poor old thing, and her daughter waiting to see her!"

"Daughter!" Kink snorted. "She's got no daughter. She's trying it on."

"How horrid you are!" Janet said. "I mean to give her a lift, anyway."

"It's against my advice," said Kink. "Anyway, promise me you won't give her any money."

"Very well," said Janet, and she invited the old woman to sit on a chair at the back of the caravan.

"The saints protect you for your kindness!" said the old woman, getting to her feet and making her way up the steps with more ease than Janet had dared to expect. "The saints protect you all — all except that suspicious ould gossoon wid the whip," she added, glowering at Kink, who was by no means backward in glowering at her in reply.

"If you had such a thing as a drop of spirits," said the old woman to Janet, who had taken a seat beside her, "I should be all right. The doctor says that there's nothing like a little stimulant for such flutterings and spasms as worry me."

"I'm afraid we haven't," said Janet; "but I could make you a cup of tea."

"There's a darlin'," said the old woman. "It's not so helpful as spirits, but there's comfort in it too."

Her sharp little eyes followed Janet as she moved about and brought together all the tea requisites.

"You're a handy young lady," she said, "and may Heaven send you a fine husband when the time comes! Ah, it's myself as a girl you remind me of, with your quick, pretty ways."

"Where did you live when you were a girl?" Janet asked.

"In a little village called Kilbeggy," said the old woman. "My father was a farmer there until the trouble came upon him. But it's little enough happiness we had after that, and niver a piece of meat passed our lips for years. Nothing but potatoes and bread. And you're eating meat twice a day, I'm thinking, all of you. Ah, it's a strange

world, and a very gay one when you're rich. I was rich once, me darlin'."

"Were you?" Janet asked in surprise.

"Oh, yes," said the old woman, "I was rich once. Me husband was a licensed victualler in Harrow, and we kept our own wagonette. Many's the time I've driven it meself into London, to a stable in the Edgeware Road, where I left it to do me shopping. It was an elegant carriage, and a white horse not so unlike your own, only smaller."

Janet handed her the tea.

"Thank you, me darlin'," said the old woman. "I'm feeling better already. That's a beautiful locket you're wearing — it is the very image of one that belonged to me poor little Clara that died."

The old woman began to cry. Janet was greatly distressed. "I can't help it," said the old woman. "Me poor little Clara! I kept it for years and years, and then it was taken from me by my landlady's son, a

good-for-nothing blackguard, in lodgings off the Pentonville Road." She sobbed afresh. "I've never been happy since," she said.

"Oh," Janet exclaimed, "do take this. I don't want it, I'm sure, if it would make you happy."

"But it's robbing you of it I am," said the old woman, as her hand closed on it.

"I'd much rather you had it," Janet replied.

"Heaven bless your kind heart!" said the old woman.

They jogged on, and she continued to look around her and to ask questions. She asked all about Janet's home and parents.

"Could you," she said at last, "lend me a shilling, my dear? It's to buy the little baby some mittens, his poor hands get that cold. I don't want you to give it, but couldn't you lend it me only for to-day? I'll post you a beautiful postal order to-night, which my daughter's husband will get for

me, or a beautiful row of stamps, if you'll give me the address of the grand house you'll be staying in at Stratford."

But Janet was firm; she had promised Kink.

"Not for the poor little mite's cold hands?" said the old woman.

It was very hard, but Janet had to say no.

The old woman said no more for some time. Then suddenly, "Did you ever see the late King, God bless him?" she asked.

"Yes," said Janet, "I saw him once. It was at the opening of Parliament."

"Then you can tell me," said the old woman, "something I want to know; for I was arguing it with my daughter's husband the last time I was here, and I want to convince him. He says — my daughter's husband, that is — that the King had thick hair on the top of his head, God bless him! and I say he hadn't. What I say is, he'd got all the hair he needed. So if you ever saw him, you could tell me."

"Oh, no, I can't," Janet said. "When I saw him he was in a carriage."

"What a pity!" said the old woman. "But haven't you a portrait of him anywhere?"

"No, I'm sure we haven't," said Janet. "Perhaps we ought to have! It would be more loyal, wouldn't it?"

"Never mind," said the old woman; "only it would put my mind at rest." And then suddenly she began to laugh. "Why," she said, "how silly we are! Of course you've got portraits of him — lashin's of them, darlin'."

"Where?" Janet exclaimed.

"In your purse," said the old woman. "On the blessed money. On the shillings and sixpences, my dear."

"Of course," said Janet, laughing too; and she drew out her purse and looked at the money it contained. There was half a sovereign and half a crown and some smaller coins; but none were new ones: all were of Victoria's reign.

"What a pity!" said the old woman again. "But perhaps one of your brothers or sisters has some more. Not the old blackguard driving, of course."

"Yes," said Janet; "I'll see;" and she descended the steps, and soon after returned with an Edward shilling.

The old woman took it and examined the head. "I was right," she said, "God bless him! He was as thin on the top as my own poor father was, rest his soul! Well, my dear, and now I'll say good-bye," she added soon after, as she rose to her feet and gave the shilling back. "If you'll make that old spalpeen stop, I'll get down, for me daughter's cottage is just over there, across the fields. Thank you very kindly for the tea and your sweet company. Good-bye, good-bye," she called, "and the saints protect you all!" and she hobbled off through a gate in the hedge.

At Alverminster Gregory insisted upon buying some acid-drops, and went to Janet

for a penny. But when she came to feel for her purse it was not to be found. She hunted everywhere in the caravan, but in vain.

"When did you have it last?" Kink asked. "You haven't bought anything to-day."

"No," said Janet, "but I had it out when the old Irishwoman was there."

"I guessed she'd get some money out of you," said Kink.

"Oh, Kink!" said Janet; "she didn't. And after I had promised, too! All she wanted to see was King Edward's head on a coin."

"What for?" Kink asked.

"To see if he was bald on the top or not," said Janet. "She had had an argument with her daughter's husband about it. Which just proves that you were wrong in thinking she had no daughter."

Kink smiled an annoying smile. "Well," he said, "what then?"

"We found a coin," said Janet, "and found that the King was bald on the top. That's all."

"And shortly afterwards she got out?" Kink asked.

"Yes, soon afterwards."

Kink laughed very heartily. "Well," he said, "I could see she was an old fraud, but I didn't think she would steal anything, or I wouldn't have let her in the caravan at all."

"Steal!" Janet cried. "Why, do you think she stole it? It's very horrid and unjust of you."

"Then where is it?" Kink asked. "That stuff about the King's head was a trick. It's a clear case. We must go to the constable's house."

"Oh, no," said Janet, "we won't. She was a poor old thing, and her heart was bad, and she was very unhappy, and I don't mind about the money."

"She's an old vagabond," said Kink,

"and her heart's as sound as mine. She wants locking up."

"I won't have it," said Janet again. "If she did steal it, it was very wrong; but she has had very bad luck. Don't let's think any more about it, but pay for the sweets and get on."

Poor Janet! no wonder she wanted the matter dropped, for there was her locket to be explained if any of the others noticed it and asked questions. She was very silent for some time, and walked alone, thinking hard. This was her first experience of theft, and it hurt her.

The children, as it happened, never did notice the absence of the locket, but they kept the memory of the old woman very green. Nothing after that could be missed without some reference to her.

"Where's the corkscrew?" Robert would say. "I suppose Kathleen Mavourneen's got it."

"It's no use," Jack would remark, "I can't find the salt. Erin go bragh!"

CHAPTER XIX

THE LETTERS TO X.

They reached Cirencester at five o'clock, and at once turned to the left to the Fairford road, intending to camp just outside the town till Monday; and it was here that Gregory had his first rebuff in his capacity as Requester of Camping-Grounds. He brought it upon himself by refusing to let Mary accompany him, and, indeed, refusing advice altogether.

He marched off to the farmhouse, which could be seen in the distance across the meadows, full of assurance; but misfortunes began at once. No sooner was he well in the first meadow than a flock of geese suddenly appeared from nowhere and approached him. There is something very horrid about the approach of a flock of geese. They are not really dangerous, but they lower their

heads and hiss and come on so steadily and are so impossible to deal with. A dog can be hit with a stick; but you can't hit

Gregory and the geese.

a goose. There were no stones to throw, and the stupid, angry birds came every moment nearer.

Gregory did not wish to go back, and did

not want to appear frightened in the eyes of the others, who were very likely watching, and he therefore had nothing to do but run as fast as he could for the farther gate and scramble over it.

Here he paused for a moment, to be in no way reassured by the sight, much too near the path, of a number of bullocks. In the ordinary way Gregory did not mind bullocks — did not, in fact, think about them — but just now he was flustered and rather nervous. However, he walked steadily forward and got safely past the first. Then, with his face kept straight and brave, but his eye anxiously peering through the back of his head to see what the first was doing, he approached the second and got past that all right. But the third gave him a wild and, as it seemed, furious look, and this turned him cold; and then he was perfectly certain that he could feel the others close behind him breathing hot on his neck, and once again he broke into a terrified run,

and so gained the next gate, over which he may be said to have fallen rather than climbed.

On the other and safe side he paused again, and again looked for the enemy. Seeing none, he once more started forward.

This was the last meadow, and the farm was at the end of it, and Gregory was quite close to the farm, when suddenly there appeared, right in his path, with a challenging tail in air, a large dog — a collie.

Gregory stopped and the collie stopped, and the two looked at each other carefully.

Gregory remembered all that he had ever heard about collies being treacherous and fierce.

He advanced a step; the collie did not move.

He advanced another step; and then, to his horror, the collie began to advance too, lifting his feet high and dangerously.

Gregory forced himself to say, "Good dog!" but the collie still advanced.

Gregory said, "Poor fellow, then!" and the collie at once did something perfectly awful: he growled.

Gregory had no courage left. His tongue and lips refused to obey him. He felt his knees turning to water.

How he wished he had let Mary come too! Dogs always liked her. Why was it that dogs liked some people and not others? he asked himself. Ridiculous! No one liked dogs better than he, if this ass of a collie only knew it.

Meanwhile, the collie, still growling, drew nearer, and Gregory felt himself pricking all over. Where would it bite him first? he wondered.

But just as he had given up all hope, a voice called out sharply, "Cæsar, come here!" and the collie turned and ran to where a tall, red-faced man was standing.

"What do you want?" the man then said to Gregory, with equal sharpness. "You're trespassing."

Gregory was frankly crying now — with relief; but he pulled himself together and said he wanted to see the farmer.

"I'm the farmer," said the man. "What is it?"

Gregory explained what he had come for.

"No," said the farmer, "not on my land."

Gregory said that other farmers had said yes.

"I don't care," said the farmer, "I say NO."

Gregory longed to ask if there was another way back, but he had not the courage, and he turned and made again for the gate of the bullock meadow.

The bullocks were still near the path, so he climbed softly over the gate, as he feared they might hear him, and crept round by the hedge to the next gate without attracting any notice.

Had he only known, he might have gone safely by the path, for one bullock was

saying to another: "There's that little duffer going all that long way out of his course just for fear of us. What do you say to trotting down to the gate and giving him another scare?"

"No," said the other. "It's not worth while. He's very small, too, and these horns, you know — they are a bit startling. Besides, there are all those flies by the gate."

"True," said the other; "but it makes me smile, all the same."

So Gregory got out safely, and, performing the same manœuvre with the geese, he reached the caravan and Janet's arms without further misfortune.

The others were of course disappointed at the result of his mission, and walked on another half-mile, much farther from Cirencester than they had wished to be, to the next farm.

There Mary and Hester made the request, which was at once granted; and the farmer and his wife were so much interested that

they both walked down to the Slowcoach and examined it, and the farmer advised its being taken into a yard where there was a great empty barn and backed against that; so that they had the whole of the barn as a kind of anteroom, and a most enchanting smell of hay everywhere.

"All I ask," he said, "is that you don't burn the place down with your cooking."

The pot was then filled and placed on the fire. Kink skinned the rabbits and Janet and Mary put them in, while Jack and Robert and Horace walked into Cirencester to buy eatables and picture postcards and send off the telegram.

That evening after supper Janet suggested that it might be the best opportunity they would have to write the letters to X. of which they had often talked; so they made themselves comfortable in the caravan and on the barn floor, and each wrote something, not after the style of the Snarker's game at Oxford, but quite separately.

Janet wrote:

"*Saturday Evening, July 8,*
"*In a Barn near Cirencester.*

"DEAR X.,

"We thank you very much for the caravan, which is much the most beautiful present that anyone can ever have had. We have now been in it nearly ten days, and we like it more every day. We have called it the Slowcoach. The party is seven, and Kink, who drives. We have with us Mary and Jack Rotheram and Horace Campbell; but whether you know who they are or not, of course I don't know. I hope some day you will tell us who you are.

"I am,
"Yours sincerely,
"JANET AVORY."

Mary Rotheram wrote:

"DEAR MR. X."

Then she crossed out the "Mr." because, as she said, it might be a lady, and began again:

"DEAR X.,

"I am not one of the Avories, and the caravan was therefore not given to me, but my brother and I have been so happy in it that I want to say thank you for it quite as if I were an Avory all the time. We live near them at Chiswick, you know. It has been a supreme holiday, with hardly any rain and no real troubles, although even the strongest people must sometimes get a little tired of walking on dusty roads and having to wait for meals. We each have a special duty, and I am the head cook, but Janet is really better at it than I am. Our only real disappointment is that caravaning makes you so tired that there is no chance of cricket, for we brought cricket things with us, but have never been able to use them. We might have done so at Salford, perhaps, but the river was so very tempting that we rowed about instead.

"Yours sincerely and gratefully,

"MARY ROTHERAM."

Jack Rotheram wrote:

"DEAR X.,

"My sister Mary has said who I am, but she has not explained how it is I am here. It is because my brother William and I tossed up for it. He called 'Heads,' and it was tails, so I won at once. And then he said 'Threes,' which means the best out of three, and this time he called 'Tails' and it was heads, so that settled the thing absolutely. He was, of course, most frightfully sick about it, but the next time the Avories go out in the caravan they are going to ask him and not me, which will put the thing right. It is a ripping caravan, and I am sure I thank you very much, although it's not mine.

"Yours truly,

"JOHN ILFORD ROTHERAM."

Robert, who was not a sprightly writer, merely described the course they had followed, which we all know. The only news he had to give was at the end: "So far, up

to the time of writing, my pedometer registers fifty-six miles; which is, of course, only what I have walked, and not what we have done, for we all take turns to ride for fear of getting too tired and being seedy. The caravan has done altogether one hundred and forty miles, and since we were in it ninety miles exactly."

Horace, after great difficulty, wrote:

"DEAR X.,

"I am having a top-hole holiday in the caravan you gave the Avories. I am the Keeper of the Tin-opener.

"Yours truly,

"HORACE CAMPBELL."

Hester wrote:

"DEAR X.,

"I have long wanted to write to you and tell you that we adore the Slowcoach, which is the name we have given your caravan, and think you were awfully clever to think of it and to make it so complete.

We have not had to buy anything, and the only thing you forgot was the license; but Uncle Christopher remembered. I love walking behind the Slowcoach and seeing the world pass by. But the evenings are the most alluring, and I like to wake up at night and hear the birds and animals just outside the window, although on the first night I was frightened. We had one evening with real gipsies, but Janet would not allow me to go inside their caravan, because of fleas and things. But I could see through the door that it was not so attractive as the Slowcoach. I wish this journey would never end, but I fear it has to do so on Tuesday, which draws nearer every moment.

"I am,

"Your grateful and admiring friend,

"Hester Margaret Avory.

"P.S. — I hope we shall never know who you are, because anonymous things are so much more exciting.

"P.S. 2. — We have met many motors,

and they are always coming up behind us and making us jump and blinding us with dust, but we have never envied them."

Gregory wrote painfully:

"DEAR X.,

"Thank you most awfully for the Slowcoach. It is very good and suitable. I am the Keeper of the Corkscrew, and also the Requester of Camping-Grounds.

"Your affectionate

"GREGORY BRUCE AVORY."

CHAPTER XX

THE ADVENTURE OF THE LINE OF POETRY

On the next morning, which was Sunday, Jack hurried through his dressing and washing at a great pace and instantly disappeared. The others were just beginning breakfast when he came rushing up in a state of wild excitement, calling, "Kink! Kink!"

"What is it?" said that leisurely man.

"It's a rabbit!" cried Jack. "I've caught it, and I don't know how to kill it."

"Oh, Jack," said Mary, running up, "don't kill it! Why should it be killed?"

"For supper, of course," said Jack. "Come on, Kink! Quick, or it will get away!"

They all left their breakfast and followed

Jack, and when they came up to him he was kneeling over a kicking object.

"Oh, Kink," he said, "do hold it and kill it! How do you do it? The gipsy boy didn't show me properly."

"The gipsy boy?" said Mary.

"Yes, he gave me a wire. See, it's round its neck. That's how I caught him. Do kill him, Kink!"

"Please don't do anything of the kind," said Janet. "We don't want to eat rabbits we catch like that."

"No," said Hester, "please don't kill it. Please let it go."

"What mollycoddles you are!" said Jack. "How do you suppose rabbits are killed, anyway? You eat them all right when they're cooked."

"I couldn't eat a rabbit that I had seen struggling alive," said Janet.

"No," said Mary. "Oh, Jack, please let him go! You've caught him, and that's the great thing; and now be merciful."

Kink still held the struggling creature.

"I vote he's let loose again," said Robert. "I don't want any of him."

"No, and I'm sure I don't," said Gregory; "but wouldn't it be fun to keep him in a hutch?"

"Wild rabbits are no good in hutches," said Kink.

Jack was very sullen. "It's awful rot," he said. "You all ought to be vegetarians if you talk like that. But we'll let him go," and he loosened the wire and the rabbit dashed away.

"A nice return to the gipsy for his kindness," Jack muttered.

Kink watched the rabbit till it was out of sight. "Whose rabbit do you suppose that was?" he asked.

"Mine," said Jack.

"What about the farmer?" said Kink. "A nice return for a night's lodging — poaching his rabbits."

"Poaching!" cried Horace. "Is that

poaching? Is Jack a poacher? Oh, how splendid! Jack's a poacher! Jack's a poacher! I wish I was."

"I'd never thought of it as poaching," said Jack, who was not a little proud of his new character.

"When did you set the wire?" Horace asked him.

"Late last night," said Jack. "After you had turned in."

"Wasn't it pitch dark?" Horace asked.

"There was a moon," said Jack, feeling twice his ordinary size.

"But what did you do?" Horace asked.

"Well," said Jack, "I had noticed some rabbits in that field on our way back from Cirencester, so I just crept off in the dark and found a hole, and took a strong stick and drove that into the ground, and then fixed the wire to it with the noose open, like this, so that the rabbit would run right into it when it came out. And it did! Poaching's frightfully simple."

"Yes," said Horace, "but it wants courage."

"Oh, yes," said Jack lightly. "Of course one mustn't be a fool or a coward."

It was arranged that Janet and Jack and Robert and Hester should go to church, and Mary and the others stay behind to cook. The boys walked, but Janet and Hester were driven in by the farmer in his chaise. Janet had a rather uncomfortable moment at the beginning of the sermon, for the text was taken from Matthew xxii., where the piece of money is produced, and the question asked, "Whose is this image and superscription?" Of course they all thought simultaneously of the old Irishwoman, and gave Janet a quick glance. She was very glad that Kink (who was a Dissenter) was not with them to fix his old laughing eye upon her.

Mary had worked very hard over the Sunday dinner, and a great surprise was waiting for the four church-goers — nothing

less than a beefsteak pudding with the most perfect soft crust and heaps of juice; and afterwards pancakes. The farmer's wife sent down some strawberries and cream, so that it was a real feast. The only one of them that was not hungry was Mary, who was too hot and tired of cooking to be able to eat much.

In spite of this huge and momentous dinner, all the children went out on Sunday afternoon to explore the neighbourhood, except Hester, who said she had something very important to do and begged to be allowed to remain alone in the Slowcoach. Kink said that he would stay there, too.

On the other side of Cirencester is a very beautiful park, with a broad avenue through it from the gates right in the town itself. The farmer's wife had told them of its attractions, and also of a ruined house known as Alfred's Hall, and a point called the Seven Ways where seven green avenues met, and a canal that ran through a tunnel,

and, all within the possibilities of good walkers, the source of the Thames itself. "And," said she, "after you have seen that — the tiny spring which makes that wonderful river that runs right through London — oh, I've been to London in my time! — you can come back to Cirencester by the Fosse Way — the Roman road to Bath."

They could not, of course, see all these things, but they went to the ruined house, which was very romantic and exactly the place for Hester had she only been with them; and they roamed about the park, which was very vast and wonderful.

They had a little adventure, too, for as they were walking along, on the way back — coming back, of course, by a different way, for Robert could not bear the thought of not doing so — Mary chanced to say, with reference to the plans for the future which Robert was describing:

"To-morrow to fresh fields and pastures new,"

that being her idea of the last line of Milton's

"Lycidas," which they had all learned quite recently.

"Not 'fresh fields,'" Janet corrected, "'fresh woods.'"

"'Fields,'" said Mary.

"'Woods,'" said Janet.

"I'm sure it's 'fields,'" said Mary.

"But it's silly," said Janet, "to say 'fresh fields and pastures new,' because they mean the same thing. 'Fresh woods' would mean something different."

"I can't help it," said Mary; "that's Milton's affair. 'Fresh fields.'"

Janet called to Robert. "Is it 'fresh fields and pastures new,' or 'fresh woods and pastures new'?" she asked him.

"'Fresh fields,'" he said.

Janet asked Jack. "I don't know," he said, "but 'fresh woods' sounds more sensible."

"Oh, dear," said Janet, "I wish we had a Milton!"

"Well, we haven't," said Robert, "and

you're not likely to find one at Cirencester to-day, unless, of course, the vicar has one."

"Oh, yes," said Janet, "of course — the vicar. He's certain to have one."

"But who'll ask him?" said Horace.

"Janet will," said Mary.

"Oh, no," said Janet.

"Well, it's your affair," said Robert.

"Not more than Mary's," said Janet. "Mary, will you ask him?"

"No," said Mary, "I don't think I could. Not the vicar. I might be willing to ask the curate."

"What a ripping idea!" said Jack. "Of course the curate would be much easier. We'll ask where he lives."

They did so at a small tobacconist's that was open, and found that the curate had rooms at Myrtle Villa, quite close by.

They therefore marched towards Myrtle Villa, but first arranged to draw lots to see who should ring the bell and make the inquiry. They tore up paper of different

sizes, and it was agreed that the holders of the longest and the shortest pieces should go — the longest to put the question, the shortest to ring and lend support. The result was that Mary drew the longest and Gregory the smallest.

Gregory was furious. "I don't even know what it's all about," he complained.

They told him.

"How rotten!" he said. "What's it matter?"

Mary, however, led him off to the house, and he rang the bell with vigour.

A smiling girl opened the door and asked what they wanted.

"Is the curate at home?" Mary asked.

The girl said that he was.

"Will you ask him if he will speak to us for a moment?" said Mary.

"What about?" asked the girl. "He has a friend with him."

"I don't think you'd understand if we told you," said Mary.

"I must know what it's about," said the girl. "He doesn't like to be disturbed on Sunday afternoons."

"Has he got a lot of books — poetry books?" Gregory asked.

"Yes," said the girl, "heaps."

"Then it's about Milton," said Mary.

"Milton the baker!" exclaimed the girl. "He's not dead, is he?"

"Milton the poet," said Mary.

"I'm all in a maze," said the girl. "I don't know what you're talking about. But I suppose I'd better tell him."

The girl left them on the mat and knocked at a door just inside.

"Come in," said a man's voice.

"Please, sir," said the girl, "there are two children asking about someone named Milton."

The owner of the voice laughed. "Are they?" he said. "Well, they've come to the right shop." And then the door opened wider and a tall and handsome young man

came out, dressed in a cricket blazer over a clergyman's waistcoat and collar, and smoking a large pipe.

A tall and handsome young man came out, dressed in a cricket blazer over a clergyman's waistcoat and collar.

"What's all this about Milton?" he said cheerily. "What Milton? Not the poet?"

"Yes," said Mary.

"Oh, I say, this is too good," said the young clergyman. "Vernon," he called out, "come here and see a deputation from Milton."

Another young man joined him, equally pleasant-looking, and they all shook hands.

"Come inside," said the young clergyman.

"There are four others waiting in the road," said Gregory.

"Then fetch them in too," said the young

clergyman. And Janet and Robert and Jack and Horace were brought in.

"Now," said the young clergyman, "have some tea." And he rang the bell and ordered enough tea for eight.

When the girl had gone, he asked for full particulars, and then gave his verdict.

"'Fresh woods and pastures new.'"

"Oh, rubbish!" said Vernon. "I've always learned 'fresh fields and pastures new.'"

"That's what I say," said Mary.

"And so do I," said Robert and Horace.

"I think *you're* right," said Janet to the young clergyman.

"Well," he said, "I'll look it up." And he began to hunt for Milton on his shelves.

"Oh, not yet!" said Vernon. "Let's have some fun first. Let's see who are the 'fielders' and who are the 'wooders.' All 'fielders' this way."

Mary, Robert, and Horace ranged themselves beside him, leaving Janet and Jack

with the young clergyman, whom Vernon called Rod.

Gregory looked at both sides, and did not move.

"Haven't you any views about it?" asked Vernon.

"No," said Gregory; "I never heard the thing before. What does it matter?"

"Very well, then," said Rod; "here's the tea. You pour it out for us. I like three lumps of sugar in mine. Now," he continued, "the rout of the 'fielders' is about to begin. Of course it's 'woods.' Why, I can see the word now in Milton's own handwriting, as I used to see it in the Library at Trinity."

"I'm so sure it's 'fields,'" said Vernon, "that I declare myself willing to go without cake for tea if it isn't."

"Will you put half a crown in the plate next Sunday if it's 'woods'?" said Rod.

"Oh, I say, that's a bit stiff," said Vernon. "Half a crown?"

"Very well, then," said Rod, "two bob. Will you put two bob in the plate next Sunday if it's 'woods'?"

"Yes, I will," said Vernon. "But if it's 'fields,' what will you do? You mayn't take a shilling out?"

"No," said Rod; "if it's 'fields' I'll eat my best hat."

"I hope it's 'fields,'" said Gregory.

"Horrid little boy!" said Rod. "But now we'll see."

He opened Milton slowly, and turned over the pages of "Lycidas." "Ha! ha!" he said; "no cake for Charles Vernon, Esquire, and two bob for Mother Church. And my best hat saved. Listen:

> "'At last he rose and twitch'd his mantle blue:
> To-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new.'"

"No cake!" groaned Vernon. "Repulsive children!" he continued tragically. "Why did you knock at this unhappy door and ask your foolish question here? Are there no other houses in Cirencester? No cake! No cake!"

They screamed with laughter.

"I like them," said Rod. "They're nice children. I hope they'll come again. And now for a large tea, with plenty of cake for all but one of us."

They would have liked to stay a long time, for Rod and Vernon were very kind and amusing, but Janet had Hester on her mind, left alone in the Slowcoach; and so directly tea was finished they said good-bye.

When Hester was told about their adventure, she said: "How silly you all are!"

"Why?" they asked indignantly.

"For two reasons," said Hester. "One is that it is, of course, 'fresh woods.' Anyone ought to know that. And the other is that we've got the 'Blue Poetry Book' with it in, here in the caravan."

"That doesn't matter," said Gregory. "We met a jolly decent clergyman."

What Hester's great business had been Janet soon learned, for as soon as they were alone Hester slipped some sheets of paper

into Janet's hand and asked her to read them very privately. Janet retired to the boudoir end of the caravan and read. It was a poem entitled:

ODE TO THE REV. FRANCIS GASTRELL

(*Dedicated to Mr. Nicholas Imber*)

O thou most base,
Who hadst possession of the dwelling-place
Of William Shakespeare, Stratford's loveliest son,
What is it thou hast done?
Thou shouldst have treasur'd it, as in a case
We keep a diamond or other jewel.
Instead of which thou didst it quite erase,
O wicked man, O fool!
What should be done to thee?
Hangèd upon a tree?
Or in the pillory
Placèd for all to pelt with eggs and bitter zest?
Aye, that were best.
Would that thou wert i' th' pillory this moment
And Stratford all in foment,
Thou knave, thou cad,
Thou everything that's bad!

HESTER MARGARET AVORY.

Janet said it was splendid, after you had got hold of the difficult rhyming idea.

"That's because it's an ode," said Hester. "Odes go like that. All jumpy. And you mustn't say 'you' in an ode. You must say 'thou.'"

"But what shall you do with it?" Janet asked.

"I want to send it to Mr. Imber," said Hester. "He said something ought to be done. He gave me his address; do you think we could post it this evening?"

Janet said they could, and they walked to the post-office and sent it off, together with a letter to Mrs. Avory, and picture postcards for Runcie and Collins. The budget for X. they kept, as they had not brought his address with them.

CHAPTER XXI

COLLINS'S PEOPLE

They resumed their journey the next morning, a little depressed in spirits, for the end was so near. It was now Monday, and they had to be home again — that is to say, in their home without wheels — to-morrow night, and the thought was not exhilarating. Moreover, as Robert's compass only too plainly showed, they were now for the first time since they started moving due east, or towards Chiswick, instead of away from it, as theretofore.

Holidays of a fortnight always go faster in the second week than the first; but the last two days absolutely fly.

They were now bound for Faringdon,

through Fairford; and the night — the last night — was to be spent, if possible, on the farm of Collins's brother, near Lechlade.

At Fairford they had their lunch and explored the church, which is one of the most remarkable in England. It was built, they learned from Robert's "Road Book," by a rich merchant in the reign of Henry VII. named John Tame. Being something of a privateer too, he had the good fortune to capture a vessel on its way from Belgium to Italy laden with stained glass, and, having secured this booty, he erected the church in order to make use of it.

Horace admired this story immensely, and set John Tame with his other heroes — Raffles and Robin Hood — forthwith.

Then came the hunt for Lycett's Farm, where Collins's people now lived, of which they knew no more than that Lechlade was the postal address. It might be this side of Lechlade, and it might be far on the other. Collins had had the map placed before her,

but could make nothing of it. (Cooks never can read maps.)

After about two miles out of Fairford Robert began to ask. There were no people on the road — indeed, one of the things that they had noticed throughout their travels was how few persons were to be met; and they had therefore to knock at a door here and there, or approach labourers in the fields. Their ignorance of the name either of Lycett's or of Collins was amazing.

"Never heard tell of such a place," said one.

"Not hereabouts," said another.

"Collins?" said a third. "There's a stone-mason of that name over at Highworth; but I don't know of no farmer."

"Maybe you're thinking of Sadler's," another suggested.

Robert, who was getting testy, asked why. "Sadler's doesn't sound a bit either like Collins or Lycett's," he said.

"No," the man agreed, "it doesn't."

But at last a butcher's boy on a bicycle came along, and Janet stopped him.

"Lycett's?" he said. Then he brightened. "Lickets, perhaps you mean. That's up the next turning to the left. I don't know who's got it, because I'm a stranger here, but I've heard that Lickets lies that way."

So Robert was recalled from a distant meadow where he had seen a man working, and they hurried on.

The turning was not a main road, but a long lane, which was so narrow that nothing else could possibly have passed by had they met anything; and for a while nothing did come. And then suddenly at a bend there was a fat farmer driving a dogcart straight at them.

He pulled up at once, and roared out: "Where be you coming to, then? We don't want no gipsies here."

Kink stopped too, and the farmer and he glared at each other.

"You must back down to the next gate," said the farmer.

"Back yourself," said Kink. "Your load's lighter than mine."

"But it's my land you're on," said the farmer.

"It's a public road," said Kink.

It looked as though they might stay there for ever, but suddenly the farmer began to laugh. "Why, you're not gipsies," he said. "I believe you're Avories."

"That's so," said Kink.

"Well, I'm blessed!" the farmer cried. "And to think we should be falling out when I've been waiting to see you these many days! My name's Pescod. My half-sister's your cook."

Mr. Pescod climbed out of his cart and shook hands with all the children. "*Now* I'll turn," he said, with a smile to Kink, and he led his horse up the lane, talking all the while, while the Slowcoach followed. They told him about their difficulty in finding any

trace of him, and he called Collins a donkey for not directing them better, and forgetting to say that her name and his were different.

"Never mind," he said; "here you are at last. We've been looking out for you for a long time. My missis never hears wheels nowadays but what she runs to the door to see if it's you."

Lycett's farm was a long, low, white house with a yew hedge leading from the garden gate to the front door. This hedge, of which Collins had told them, was famous in the neighbourhood; for it was enormously old, and as thick almost as masonry, and it was kept so carefully clipped that it was as smooth also as a wall. At the gate itself the yews were cut into tall pillars with a pheasant at the top of each, and then there were smaller pillars at intervals all the way up the path, about twenty yards, with a thick joining band of yew between them. They were so massive that very little light could get into the front windows or the

doorway; but, as Mr. Pescod said, "anyone can have light, but there are precious few yew hedges like that in the world."

Mrs. Pescod was a comfortable, smiling woman whose one idea was that everyone must either be hungry or in need of feeding up. All of the children in turn she looked at anxiously, saying that she was sure that they had not had enough to eat. As a matter of fact, they had not perhaps eaten as much as they would have done at Chiswick, and they had, of course, worked harder; but they were all

Mrs. Pescod was a comfortable, smiling woman.

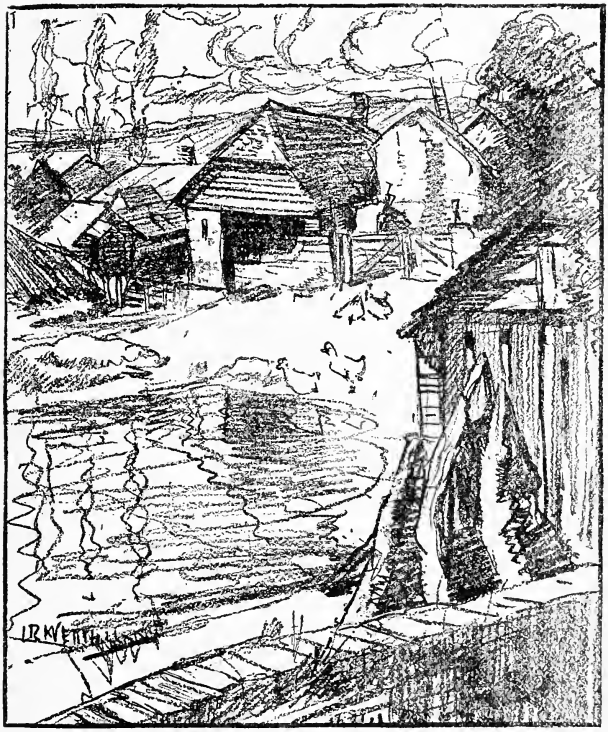
very well, and said so. But it made no difference to Mrs. Pescod.

"Ah, my dear," she said to Janet, "you're pale. I shouldn't like you to go back to your ma looking like that. No, while you're here you must have three good meals. A good tea, and a good supper, and a good breakfast. I wish you'd stay longer, and let me have a real go at you; but if you can't, you can't, and there's an end of it."

Mrs. Pescod's notion of a good tea was terrific. Eggs for everyone to begin with (to Gregory's great pleasure, for an egg with his tea was almost his favourite treat). Freshly baked hot cakes soaking in butter. Hot toast. Three kinds of jam. Bread and butter. Watercress. Mustard and cress. This was at five o'clock, and as supper was at half-past eight, Janet urged the others to explore as much as possible, or they would have no appetite, and then Mrs. Pescod would be miserable.

It was a delightful farm. There was

everything that one wants in a farm, — a



It was a delightful farm.

pond with ducks; a haystack half cut, so that one might jump about on it; straw

ricks on stone posts; cowsheds smelling so warm and friendly, with swallows darting in and out of the doorway to their nests in the roof; stables with gentle horses who ate the green stuff you gave them without biting you; guinea-pigs, the property of Master Walter Pescod, who was a weekly boarder at Cirencester; fantail pigeons; bantams; ferrets, very frightening to everyone but Kink, who knew just how to hold them; and a turnip-slicer, which Gregory turned for some time, munching turnip all the while.

Mrs. Pescod led the girls round with her on an egg-hunt, which is always one of the most interesting expeditions in life; and Mr. Pescod, as the evening drew on, allowed the boys to accompany him with his gun to get a rabbit or two under the hedge, and he permitted Jack to fire it off. Nothing happened except that Jack was nearly knocked backwards by the "kick"; but he was very proud of the bruise, and when

he returned to Chiswick showed it to his father and to William in triumph.

It was getting purple then, with green edges, and Dr. Rotheram pronounced it one of the best bruises he had ever seen. "Good enough," he said, "to have killed a lion with."

"Yes," said William, "instead of missing a rabbit."

Mrs. Pescod, of course, wanted the children to sleep indoors, but they would not. "It is our very last night in the caravan," said Janet, "and we couldn't give it up." So Mrs. Pescod instead made them promise to come to breakfast, and gave them each a large cake of her own making in case they felt hungry in the night.

CHAPTER XXII

THE ADVENTURE OF THE GIANT

After receiving a thousand messages for Collins, both affectionate and jocular — one from Mr. Pescod being on no account to forget to tell her to try anti-fat — they said good-bye to these kind folk and marched into Faringdon the next morning, very sorry it was the last, but determined to make a brave show. Through watery Lechdale they went, over the Isis (as the Thames is called here), and past Buscot.

It was just after leaving Buscot that Gregory, who had been ahead alone, suddenly rushed back in a wild state of excitement.

"What do you think I've seen?" he panted. "A giant! A real live giant!"

You mustn't look at me like that.

"Don't be an ass!" said Jack.

"But I have," he protested — "I have. He's there in that wood, kneeling by the stream, washing his face. I watched him walk to it. He's enormous! He's as tall as this caravan nearly. Do come and peep at him."

They all very readily accompanied Gregory into the wood, and there, sure enough, was a giant, combing his hair.

He heard them coming, and looked round. They stopped, open-eyed and open-mouthed.

"Here, I say," the giant said at last, "this won't do. You mustn't look at me like that — free. It's a penny each, you know."

He had a broad Yorkshire accent and a kind face.

"Where do you come from?" he asked.

"We come from London," said Janet. "We are on a caravan journey."

"A caravan journey," said the giant. "So am I. I always am, in fact."

"Are you?" said Gregory. "How splendid!"

"Splendid!" said the giant. "Do you think so? I'd give a good deal to sleep in a bed in a house. Excuse me if I sit down," he added. "My legs aren't very strong."

He sat down, but even then he was taller than any of the children.

"Where is your caravan?" Janet asked.

"Just over there," the giant said. "They're waiting for me. I came here to make my toilet. Where are you going?"

"We're going to Faringdon," said Robert.

"That's where we've come from," said the giant. "There's been a fair there. We're going to Cirencester."

"What a shame!" said Horace. "That means we've missed you."

"But you're seeing me now," said the giant, adding again, with his Yorkshire laugh, "free."

"I know," said Jack, "but that's not the

same as at a fair. The naphtha lamps, you know."

The giant shuddered. "I like to be away from them," he said.

"Who else is there with you?" asked Gregory.

"The King," said the giant.

"The King!" they all exclaimed.

"Yes, King Pip. He's a dwarf. We travel together, but we show separately. A penny each."

"Might we see him if we paid a penny?" Janet asked.

"I shouldn't if I were you," said the giant.

"Why not?" said Gregory. "Isn't he nice?"

"No," said the giant very firmly. "He's not; he's nasty."

"I'm so sorry," said Janet.

"So am I," said the giant.

"I've always liked giants best," said Mary.

"But why don't you leave him?" said Jack.

"I can't," said the giant. "We don't belong to ourselves. We belong to Mr. Kite. Mr. Kite is the showman."

"And did you sell yourself to him like a slave?" Hester asked.

The giant laughed. "Very much like a slave," he said. "You see, there's nothing else to do when you're big like me and have no money. I'm too weak to work, and it's ridiculous, too. No one ought to be so big. So I must do what I can."

"What's the matter with King Pip?" Robert asked.

"He's selfish and bad-tempered," said the giant. "He thinks it's a fine thing to be so small."

"And you think it a fine thing to be so big, don't you?" said Robert.

The giant opened his blue eyes. "I! Not me. I'd give everything I ever possessed to be five feet seven instead of seven feet five. It's never done me any good."

"But it's rather grand to be as big as that," Robert suggested.

"Grand! You may have the grandeur. It's worse than being a criminal. I can't walk out unless it's pitch dark or very early morning, because if I did the people would see me free—as you are doing. I have to live in a narrow stuffy carriage. I'm ill, too. Giants are always ill."

Janet was full of sympathy. "We're so sorry," she said. "And here's our money — it isn't fair to be seeing you free." And she held out sixpence.

"Oh, no," said the giant. "I didn't mean that. I like to see you and talk. There's too few people to talk to naturally. Most of them ask silly questions all the time, especially the doctors. If you want to pay to see me, you must come to the fair. I shall be on view to-night."

"But we're going the other way," said Robert.

"I'm very sorry," said the giant. "I should have looked forward to seeing you."

"What's your name?" Gregory asked.

"My real name is William Steward," said the giant, "but they call me the Human Colossus."

"Is there anything we could do for you?" Janet asked. "We have some papers; would you like them?"

"No," said the giant; "I don't read much. There is one thing I'd like, but I don't suppose you have it. A little tobacco. I'm clean out of it, and I'd like a smoke."

"We've got tobacco all right," said Robert. "You know," he added to Janet, "in that tin labelled 'For ——'"

But Janet stopped him in time, and drew him aside. "Run and get it," she said; "but be sure to scrape the label off. He wouldn't like to see 'For Tramps and Gipsies' on it."

Robert was quickly back, and handed the tin to the giant, who was delighted.

He was just beginning his thanks when a

shrill whistle sounded, and he said good-bye instead.

"That's His Majesty," he explained. "He thinks I've been long enough. And I am long enough," he added, making his only joke — "too long. Well, good-bye. I'm glad to have met you. Don't forget to look for the Human Colossus whenever you come to a fair. It's easy to remember the Human Colossus. Good-bye."

And he shambled off through the trees to the road.

They had their last lunch with Kink just outside Faringdon's red town, and then sped him on his solitary way home, promising, however, to come and meet him somewhere outside London in three or four days' time; and so they stood in a group in the middle of the road until the Slowcoach and its driver and its black guardian were out of sight. And if some of their eyes were not quite dry, I am sure you don't blame them.

"Now," said Robert, as he made a note of

what his pedometer said — sixty-seven miles and a quarter, for he considered this the end of the real walk — "now for the station."

First, however, a telegram had to go, and Hester insisted on sending it, as she had an idea, and this is what she sent:

"Avory, The Gables, Chiswick. Alas! alack! we're coming back."

They caught a train on the funny little branch-line which turned them out at Uffington, and, armed with Mr. Scott's present, "The Scouring of the White Horse," which Mary carried and occasionally read scraps from as they walked along, they made for the green hills and the famous animal cut on their side. To reach it was impossible, for the London train left at 6.24, and it was now nearly three, and there was tea to be eaten; but they came near enough to see it distinctly, and to marvel that the name of horse should ever have been given to it. As

Gregory said, "It's no more like a horse than Shakespeare is like a swan."

And then they had tea at a nice inn at Uffington, in a parlour full of photograph-frames, and returned to the station.

As the train left, they leaned back in their seats, a great deal more tired than they had ever been in the Slowcoach.

"What a hateful rate this train goes at!" said Robert. "I prefer two miles an hour."

"Oh, yes," they said.

At Paddington they found Collins and Eliza Pollard, with a station omnibus, and they rattled down to Chiswick, pouring out the news, especially that from Lycett's farm.

And so, after dropping Mary and Jack and Horace at their homes, they came once again to "The Gables." A cold supper was waiting for them — one of those nice late meals after a journey — and Mrs. Avory and Runcie sat with them while they ate it.

"You must be glad to be back," Runcie said, "and to sleep in nice beds once more."

"Oh, Runcie," said Hester, "you don't really understand anything."

"I understand what King Edward's head is like on a shilling," said Runcie, with a little twinkle at Janet.

Janet blushed.

"What a shame," she said, "to tell that story! Hester, I suppose that was you, in one of your letters."

"Yes," said Hester; "but, Janet darling, you told me always to tell *all* the news."

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MOST SURPRISING ADVENTURE OF ALL

The children had been back two or three days, and Kink was still on the road, when one morning a telegram came from him saying that he had reached Hounslow, and Robert asked if they might all walk out to meet him, and so return home triumphantly in a body. Mrs. Avory agreed, and they trooped off, after the briefest lunch, taking Horace Campbell and the Rotherams with them.

They had been gone two or three hours, and Mrs. Avory was sitting talking with Runcie, when Eliza Pollard brought a card on the brass tray that Janet had repousséd for her mother's last Christmas present. It ran:

Mr. Henry Amory
The Red House,
Chiswick, W.

"I don't know him," said Mrs. Avory. "What is he like?"

"Well, mum," said Eliza Pollard, "he's a short gentleman with a red face and two boys, and he seems very angry."

"Ask him what he wants to see me about," said Mrs. Avory.

"I did," said Eliza Pollard, "and he said he could not tell me, but the matter was of the highest importance."

A short gentleman with a red face and two boys.

Mrs. Avory took the card and descended

to the drawing-room, where the visitors were waiting for her.

Mr. Amory bowed. "Pardon me, madam," he said, "but I have come to know what you have done with my caravan."

"Your caravan!"

"Yes, madam, my caravan. A caravan was sent as a present to my sons some three weeks or a month ago, and your family, I am creditably informed, seized and detained it."

"Excuse me," said Mrs. Avory, "but we did nothing of the sort. A caravan was sent here for my children as a present, and we have simply made use of it. They have been away in it for a fortnight. It returns to-day!"

"Ha!" said Mr. Amory. "Perhaps you will have the goodness to inform me who gave it to you?"

"That," said Mrs. Avory, "I can't do——"

"Ha!" said Mr. Amory.

"—— because," Mrs. Avory continued,

"I don't know. We have never discovered. The giver wished to be anonymous."

Mr. Amory looked surprised, and became a shade less fierce.

"You took no steps to find out?" he asked.

"How could I? There was no clue to go upon."

"I see, I see," said Mr. Amory. "There has been a huge mistake. Perhaps you will allow me to read you a letter which we received a day or so ago:

"'DEAR CHILDREN,

"'I have just come back, much sooner than I expected; but, finding no letter from you, I have made some inquiries as to what you have done with the caravan, and, to my amazement, cannot discover that it has ever reached you at all; and since, if it has not, this letter must be all Greek to you, I may now say that on the 23rd of June a caravan fully furnished for a journey should have arrived at your house with a letter

saying it was from your friend X., as it amused me to call myself. I have been to the man whom I employed to take it to you, but he is in hospital. His wife, however, is convinced that he did take it to Chiswick all right. Please ask your father to try to discover to what house it was sent. To-morrow evening I shall come to see you all.

"'Your affectionate

"'Uncle Eustace.'"

"There," said Mr. Amory, "you see. Not, however, that I should have let my sons go away in it — at any rate, without me" — the two little boys winced — "but different people have different ideas. Well," he continued, "I have been investigating, and of course I soon discovered that the caravan had come here, and that your children had gone off in it. I will admit that we have only just come to Chiswick, and that you were better known here; but the

fact remains that the letter was addressed, not to the name of Avory, but Amory."

Mrs. Avory was bewildered. "It is all very unexpected," she said. "I really cannot remember reading the address on the envelope at all. It was handed to me as mine, and I opened it. It may have been Amory. If you care to see the letter, I have it."

"Please," said Mr. Amory; and Mrs. Avory went to her desk.

"Now, boys, listen to me," said Mr. Amory to his two sons. "Let this be a lesson to you. Never give anonymous presents. It is foolish, and it leads to trouble; and very likely the wrong person will be thanked."

Mrs. Avory handed him the letter, and he read it.

"Quite clear," he said, "but not what I call a sensible way of doing things. Your explanation satisfies me."

Mrs. Avory expressed her regret that the

mistake had occurred. "But," she added, "you must allow that we had no other course than to accept the present as though it really belonged to us. We have for so many years been the only Avories here."

"But have you so many friends," Mr. Amory inquired, "who would be likely to give you anonymously so handsome a gift? It did not strike you as strange?"

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Avory.

Mr. Amory again said "Ha!"

"The caravan," Mrs. Avory resumed, rising to her feet, "shall be put in order directly it returns, and sent to your address. Anything that has been taken from it or broken shall be replaced. I can say no more than that. Good afternoon."

It was not, however, the end of the visit, for at that instant the sound of heavy wheels was heard, and cheers in the street, and, looking out of the window, Mrs. Avory saw that the Slowcoach had already arrived, escorted (as it had left) by all the children of

Chiswick, and a moment later Janet burst into the room, crying, "Mother, do come and see!"

She pulled up stiff on observing the strangers.

"Janet, dear," said Mrs. Avory, "there has been a serious mistake. The Slowcoach is not ours at all. It belongs to this gentleman's children."

Janet gasped. "But it was sent to us," she said at last.

"No," said Mr. Amory; "I beg your pardon, young lady, but it was sent to *us*. It came to you in error."

Janet looked questioningly at her mother, and Mrs. Avory nodded yes. Hester and Gregory now entered the room to insist on their mother either coming out or giving leave for some of the street children to be allowed to go inside the caravan. But Mr. Amory interposed. "No," he said. "I prefer not. They are rarely clean."

Gregory looked at him in dismay.

"Mother!" he exclaimed.

"Janet," whispered Mrs. Avory, who knew her youngest son, "take Gregory away, and keep him out of sight till they go."

"But we," Mr. Amory resumed, "will examine the caravan. I suppose there was no inventory."

"No," said Mrs. Avory.

"Very unfortunate," he muttered, "and very unsystematic. However, we must hope for the best;" and so saying he led the way toward the yard, with his meek little sons, who had said not a word, but appeared to wish themselves well out of the affair, behind him.

Kink had already unharnessed Moses, and the Slowcoach stood at rest. Mr. Amory first went to examine a place on the wheel where a gate-post had removed some of the paint, and he then put a foot on the step; but Diogenes sprang up and growled so seriously that he withdrew.

"Please remove the dog," he said.

While this was being done, and the father and his two sons were inside, Janet explained the situation to the others. They refused at first to believe it.

"Do you mean to say," Robert exclaimed, "that the Slowcoach isn't ours at all?"

"Yes," said Janet.

"It belongs to those measly pip-squeaks?" said Robert.

"Yes," said Janet.

Robert held his head in a kind of stupor.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE END

THEY had a very solemn tea. Everyone was depressed and mortified.

"We couldn't help it, could we, mother?" Janet said several times.

"Of course not," said Mrs. Avory. "It's no one's fault except the foolish man who brought the caravan here. What has Kink said about it?" But as no one had asked him, he was called to the cedar-tree, beneath which tea was laid on fine days.

"Here's a go, mum," he said.

"What did the man say who brought the caravan?" Mrs. Avory said.

"As near as I can remember he showed me the letter, and said, 'Is that all right?' I looked at it, and read, 'To be given to

Mrs. Avory' on it, so I said, 'Yes,' Then he said, 'I've got a caravan for your lot, cockie,' and backed it into the yard."

"How splendid!" said Robert. "Then it was you who did it, Kinky?"

"Did what, Master Robert?"

"Got us the Slowcoach; because the address wasn't Mrs. Avory at all; it was Mrs. Amory."

"Oh, I don't take much count about m's or v's," said Kink. "It began with a big 'A,' and it ended in 'ory,' and that was good enough for me."

"Kink," said Janet, "you're a dear. You've given us the most beautiful holiday."

Hester suddenly turned pale. "Mother!" she exclaimed, "what about the twenty-five sovereigns?"

"Yes," said Robert, "that's awful!"

"It is rather bad," said Mrs. Avory, "because, of course, it will have to be given back, and at once too, and I'm not at all rich just now. I'm not even sure that we

have any right to go to Sea View, and the twenty-five pounds will just spoil everything."

"Why should we give it back?" said Gregory.

"Because it's not ours," said Mrs. Avory. "There's no question at all."

"I think Kinky ought to pay it," said Gregory. "He's got heaps of money in the Post-Office, and it's his fault, too."

"The best thing to do," said Mrs. Avory, "is to telephone to Uncle Christopher and tell him all about it, and ask him to come over to-night and give us his advice. He always knows best."

"And Mr. Scott and Mr. Lenox, too," said Robert.

"Very well," said Mrs. Avory. "They were all here at the beginning, and they had better be here at the end."

Mr. Lenox, who came first, was immensely tickled. "Who stole the caravan?" he asked at intervals through the evening.

Mr. Scott took it more practically. "We must have another," he said, "and have it built to our own design. Let the Slow-coach provide the ground-plan, so to speak, and then improve on it by the light of your experience. You must by this time each know of certain little defects in the Slow-coach that could easily be done away with."

"Of course," said Robert. "Blisters."

"Don't rot," said Gregory. "I know of something, Mr. Scott. The roof. It ought to have a felt covering, so as to soften the rain."

"Exactly," said Mr. Scott. "And you, Janet?"

"I used to wonder," said Janet, "if there could not be some poles, such as those that you raise carriage-wheels with when you wash them, to lift the caravan above its springs at night. As it is, every movement makes it shake or rock. They could be carried underneath quite easily."

"Very good," said Mr. Scott. "And you, Mary?"

"I heard about a caravan yesterday," said Mary, "that had two little swings at the back for small children when they were tired."

"That's a good idea," said Mr. Lenox. "For Gregory, for instance."

"I'm not a small child," said Gregory, "and I don't get tired."

"Oh," said Janet, "what about those times when you said you couldn't walk at all?"

"Shut up," said Gregory.

"Very well, then," said Mr. Scott; "if you really are still keen on caravaning, I'll give you a new one, with proper title-deeds, in case any new Mr. Amory turns up, and we will all superintend its building."

"Hurrah!" cried the children.

"And we'll call it Slowcoach the Second."

It was at this point that Uncle Christopher came in.

"This is very sad," he said. "To think of my nephews and nieces running off with another person's caravan!"

"But what shall we do?" Mrs. Avory asked.

"There's nothing to do," said Uncle Christopher, "but to have it cleaned up and put in order as soon as possible, and sent round to its real owner."

"The dreadful thing," said Janet, "is the twenty-five pounds."

"Yes, I know," said Uncle Christopher; "but I believe there's a way out of even that difficulty. I told your aunt all about it when I got back from the office, and she wished me to tell you that she would like to refund the twenty-five pounds herself."

There was a long pause.

"O dear," said Janet at last, as she hid her face in her mother's arms, "everybody is much too kind."